The National School English Literacy Survey conducted in August-September 1996 provides the most comprehensive picture yet developed of the literacy achievements of Year 3 and Year 5 students in Australian schools.

The most significant finding of the Survey is the wide range of literacy achievement among Australian children. The top 10 per cent of students in each Year are working about five year levels ahead of the bottom 10 per cent. This range indicates the complexity of the teacher’s task in providing appropriate learning opportunities for all students, and the need for schools to reflect on the implications of this range for teaching and learning practices.
Management Committee for the National School English Literacy Survey

Mapping Literacy Achievement

Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey

Incorporating a report on the Survey principles, procedures and findings by

Geoff N Masters
Margaret Forster

Australian Council for Educational Research

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH AFFAIRS
Dear Dr. Kemp,

The Management Committee for the National School English Literacy Survey has much pleasure in presenting the Report on the Survey which took place in government and non-government schools in all States and Territories in August-September 1996. Under the direction of the Management Committee, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) undertook the Survey and analysed its results. The resulting Report provides an excellent and comprehensive overview of the Survey methodology and findings.

Assessment Methodology

The Management Committee has written an introduction to the Report which documents its role and that of the earlier Steering Committee in collaboratively developing and implementing the Survey assessment methodology. This assessment methodology was unique in the way it linked the richness and validity of classroom assessment practices into the framework of a reliable national data collection process. While the focus on teacher judgment meant that this methodology was more costly than assessment processes dependent on external marking, the methodology proved to be a very effective tool in obtaining assessment data across a wide range of achievement that was reliable and valid. Additional strengths of this assessment model included professional development benefits for teachers and the enhancement of teacher professionalism through the emphasis on teacher judgment. In the event of future national surveys, the Management Committee would strongly recommend that consideration be given to employing the same methodological approach adopted here.

The Management Committee would like to draw attention to several features of the Survey methodology which it considers advance assessment practice in this country and perhaps internationally. All these features flow from the concept that common tasks and student best work relevant to classroom learning programs are the best context for valid assessment of student achievement. It is significant that the Survey was able to demonstrate that teacher judgment of student achievement is reliable when supported by good assessment materials, professional development and the provision of advice from trained external assessors. Because of the innovative nature of the methodology, ACER undertook a process to confirm the reliability of teacher assessments: the outcome of this process was that almost all teacher assessments were left unchanged. Data from the Survey represents much more than a snapshot of student achievement: by integrating the assessment processes with classroom learning programs over a six week period of time, each participating teacher was able to allocate about eight hours to the assessment of his or her students, resulting in a valid estimate of each student’s achievement. Finally, a fruitful investigation was made of the relationship between students’ achievements on common tasks administered under timed conditions and students’ achievements on classroom tasks where students had opportunities to review, revise and edit their work.
The title of the Report, *Mapping Literacy Achievement*, is significant. This Report provides for the first time a national map of the broad range of literacy achievements among Year 3 and Year 5 students in Australian schools, documenting the varied Levels of student achievement in those aspects of literacy which constitute the framework of the English curriculum profile: Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening and Viewing. This is in contrast to the more limited scope of earlier national surveys of literacy achievement which were developed to gather data about the percentage of students unable to satisfy minimal levels of competence in reading comprehension.

The data in the Report has been analysed and reported from a number of different perspectives to provide the most informative picture possible of literacy achievement in Australian schools. In addition to reporting achievement data against a set of achievement scales specially constructed for the Survey, results are reported against the Levels of the English curriculum profile and for the various subgroups of the student population. Another set of analyses was conducted to investigate those teacher/school and student/home factors correlated with literacy achievement and to explore possible explanations for differences in students’ literacy levels.

One of the aims of the Survey was to obtain base-line data so that it is possible to establish national benchmarks against which teachers, schools and systems can assess the effectiveness of current programs and can adjust their goals and programs to improve literacy levels.

Under the direction of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), the Curriculum Corporation is currently developing benchmarks for literacy and numeracy at Years 3 and 5. In order to provide valuable information to inform the benchmark development process, the Management Committee agreed that the relationship between the draft benchmarks and the Survey results should be analysed. The Survey instruments were designed prior to the benchmark development process and there were some difficulties in establishing the relationship between the Survey and the draft benchmarks. The benchmarks are still in draft form for consultation and the final benchmarks may differ somewhat from the drafts used here. To identify a precise point on a continuum of achievement also involves estimation and is to some extent arbitrary. For these reasons, the results of this analysis are presented in an Appendix and should be interpreted with caution. The results of the analysis for reading and writing are presented. Taking the above considerations into account, an indicative range of student achievement in which each draft benchmark may be expected to lie has been reported, along with the achievement of students in relation to that range of achievement.

Two separate samples of students were established to collect data for the Survey, the Main Sample and the Special Indigenous Sample. The Main Sample was a representative sample of all Australian students and provides a reliable picture of the literacy achievements of all Australian students and of the larger subgroups in the population. As there were not sufficient numbers of Indigenous students in the Main Sample to enable reliable conclusions to be drawn about the achievements of Indigenous students as a national subgroup, the Management Committee, after discussions with Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies in all States and Territories, decided to set up a special sample of Indigenous students. It is important to note that for reasons explained in this...
letter under the section entitled Achievements of Students in the Special Indigenous Sample, the data collected for the Special Indigenous Sample is not representative of the achievement levels of all Indigenous students in Australia. Therefore, it is not statistically valid to compare the performances of all Indigenous students with the performances of all students in the Main Sample, and consequently the achievement data for the Special Indigenous Sample and the Main Sample are reported separately in this Report.

The main research findings of the Survey are summarised at the beginning of the Principles and Findings Section of the Report. The Management Committee would like to highlight those findings which it considers have particular significance in the current educational context.

**A WIDE RANGE OF ACHIEVEMENT AMONG AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL STUDENTS**

The most significant finding of the Survey is the wide range of literacy achievement among Australian school children at both Years 3 and 5. Data from the Main Sample in the Survey indicates that the top 10 per cent of students at both Year 3 and Year 5 are working about five year levels ahead of the bottom 10 per cent of students. This suggests that in most classrooms there is a wide range of achievement among students. The breadth of this range of achievement is indicative of the complexity of the teacher’s task in providing appropriate learning opportunities for all students in a class. Schools need to reflect on the implications of this finding for their teaching and learning practices.

This range of achievement in the Main Sample is described in the Main Findings Section of this Report which sets out the percentages of students working at each Level of the English curriculum profile covered by this Survey. The percentages of students working at each profile Level are summarised below in tabular form.

**Percentages of students at Years 3 and 5 working in Levels of the English curriculum profile by writing, reading, viewing, speaking and listening:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile Level</th>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Viewing</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>5**</td>
<td>12**</td>
<td>4**</td>
<td>5**</td>
<td>13**</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>12**</td>
<td>12**</td>
<td>16**</td>
<td>17**</td>
<td>20**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>47</td>
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<td>Year 3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41*</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>15*</td>
<td>21*</td>
<td>12*</td>
<td>7*</td>
<td>4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>6*</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* at this Level or below  
** at this Level or above  
These percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number so may not add to 100%.
The Main Findings Section of the Report also describes the typical skills of students in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening and Viewing working at each of the Levels of the English curriculum profile and students’ achievements at each profile Level are illustrated by work samples. This material is also presented in the form of growth charts for Reading, Writing and Spelling which are included in the Report package.

The distribution of student achievement for students in the Main Sample in comparison to the achievement range which is estimated to contain the draft benchmark standard is described in Appendix 3 to the Report for both reading and writing. The percentage of students who appear to be working above the range of achievement estimated to contain the draft benchmark, the percentage of students who appear to be working below that range of achievement, as well as the percentage of students who appear to be working within that range of achievement is summarised in tabular form below.

Percentages of students at Years 3 and 5 working above, within or below the range of achievement estimated to contain the draft benchmark standard, by writing and reading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Level</th>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>Writing %</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above the range of achievement estimated to contain the draft benchmark</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the range of achievement estimated to contain the draft benchmark</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below the range of achievement estimated to contain the draft benchmark</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Achievements of National Subgroups in the Main Sample**

The Survey was not a longitudinal study. However, it was possible to quantify student achievements at Year 3 and at Year 5 on the same scale and so these achievements can be directly compared in each aspect of literacy and an estimate can be made of typical ‘growth’ over these two years of schooling.

For the Main Sample, there appears to be progress in literacy between years 3 and 5 for all of the identified national subgroups. This is true for high, medium and low socio-economic status groups based on parental occupation, for girls and boys and for students from both English language backgrounds and language backgrounds other than English. Students tend to progress more rapidly in Reading, Listening and Viewing (receptive aspects of literacy) than in Writing and Speaking (expressive aspects of literacy).
The Survey data on the various subgroups is in line with the direction of existing literacy research. Children from high socio-economic backgrounds as a group achieve at significantly higher levels than children from other socio-economic backgrounds. The mean achievement of girls is higher than the mean achievement of boys. Students from a language background other than English as a group have lower levels of literacy in English than students from English speaking backgrounds. The achievement differences arising from groupings based on socio-economic background are larger than for gender and the differences arising from gender are in turn larger than those arising from a language background other than English. However, more detailed analyses of achievements by aspect of literacy and by subgroup highlight some other differences. Further exploration of these differences may provide some new insights into the complex process of literacy acquisition.

At Year 3, the disparity between the literacy achievements of students from different socio-economic backgrounds for all aspects of literacy is compelling and this disparity in achievement increases between high and other socio-economic groups during the middle primary years. In Reading and Listening from Year 3 to Year 5, most growth occurs for children from high socio-economic backgrounds while least growth occurs for children from low socio-economic backgrounds. In Writing and Speaking, children from medium socio-economic backgrounds do not make the same progress between Year 3 and Year 5 as students from other socio-economic groups.

Gender differences in literacy achievement are larger for Writing and Speaking (the expressive modes of literacy) than for Reading, Listening and Viewing (the receptive modes) with the greatest gender difference occurring for Writing and the least for Viewing. This gender difference in achievement does not widen significantly between Year 3 and Year 5. The differences between boys’ and girls’ levels of literacy achievement are greater among students from low socio-economic backgrounds than among students from other socio-economic groups.

There is a tendency for students from language backgrounds other than English to perform less well in Listening, Reading and Viewing compared to Writing and Speaking. This achievement difference between the receptive and expressive aspects of literacy is most marked for Listening and Writing.

For over a decade, the disparity in literacy achievement between various subgroups of students has concerned education authorities. All State and Territory education systems and most non-government school authorities have introduced major new and, in many cases resource intensive, programs to address the needs of those students who appear to be falling behind. Evidence about the long-term effectiveness of these programs is inconclusive and longitudinal data would be required to make use of the data collected on these programs in the 1996 Survey. The Survey’s extensive data base provides an excellent base-line to monitor the direction of any changes that may occur over time and to isolate the factors or groups of factors that may contribute to that change.
In contrast to the Main Sample, the Special Indigenous Sample was not a nationally representative sample of all Indigenous students. It was a sample of students in those schools reporting at least five Indigenous students at both Year 3 and Year 5 and provides a picture of the literacy learning of that subgroup of Indigenous students, largely living in rural and remote areas where the Indigenous population is more concentrated. The Management Committee’s rationale for drawing the Special Sample in this way was to enable an assessment methodology based on teacher judgment to be used in both the Main Sample and the Special Sample. This decision was made against the background of consultation with Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies which supported the Survey methodology, and considerable interest by governments and the Consultative Bodies in obtaining better data on the achievements of Indigenous students to inform policy development.

Students in the Special Indigenous Sample have very low average levels of English literacy achievement. However, there is a very wide range of literacy achievement amongst these students at both Year 3 and Year 5. The Survey data suggests that during the middle primary years the top 20 per cent of students in this sample appear to make quite good progress while the bottom 20 per cent of students often appear to make practically no progress. At Year 5 in Reading, Writing and Speaking, this group of lower achieving students is still at a very basic stage in developing literacy skills. For a significant proportion of these lower achieving students, English is a second language. Students in the Special Indigenous Sample, on average, achieve comparatively strongly in Listening compared to the other aspects of literacy. They achieve comparatively poorly in Reading.

**Factors Associated with Literacy Achievement**

Literacy acquisition is a particularly complex process because of the interplay of individual learning with the myriad of factors arising from home and school culture. After factors such as parents’ socio-economic background, gender, language background and school background have been taken into account, the Survey indicates that there are a number of teacher/school and student/home factors which are meaningfully associated with higher literacy achievement and these are set out in Table 4.3 of the Report. The Management Committee would like to draw attention to just a few of these associations which it considers require further exploration because of their potential to stimulate fresh and more successful approaches to teaching and learning literacy.

- Perhaps the most striking finding is the high association between reported enjoyment of Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening and Viewing and higher achievement. Given this finding it is concerning that students’ enjoyment of class literacy activities declines from Year 3 to Year 5. In this context it is interesting to note the trend that from Year 3 to Year 5 the percentage of students reading books every day at home declines while the number of hours students watch television and videos outside school hours each day increases.

- There are differences between schools in terms of average levels of literacy achievement which cannot totally be explained by the socio-economic background of students’ parents, school gender composition or the proportion of students from a
language background other than English. These differences require further exploration.

• Effective literacy teaching practices that involve extensive use of the school library and classroom computers are associated with higher literacy achievement. The length of teaching experience is also associated with higher literacy achievement.

• Students who appear to have completed homework nearly every day have higher literacy skills than those who do not appear to regularly complete homework.

• There are a few factors that appear to be associated with the lower achievement of students in the Special Indigenous Sample; for nearly 10 per cent of these students English is a second language and is never, rarely or only sometimes spoken at home; and as a group these students have much higher rates of absence from school. Also of interest is the descriptive material finding that students from the Special Indigenous Sample read less often outside school than students from the Main Sample and considerably fewer students in the Special Indigenous Sample report doing homework every day.

NATIONAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY PLAN AND NEXT STEPS

The extensive data in this Report has established a sound research base to inform the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. This research base provides a means of monitoring the effectiveness of the National Plan in strengthening literacy achievement for all Australian children. Mapping changes in the complex and dynamic area of literacy achievement requires an assessment methodology that is not only valid and reliable but can also draw on the professional knowledge of teachers to capture the full range of literacy achievement among students. The assessment methodology used in the 1996 Survey meets these criteria.

In relation to implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan, the Management Committee suggests that consideration be given to conducting in the year 2000, in the first or second terms of Year 7, a sample survey using the assessment methodology for the 1996 Survey in order to assess what proportion of Year 7 students has achieved the national literacy goal at the completion of at least six years of primary schooling. The focus of the survey would be the achievements of these students at the end of primary schooling, although the majority of participating students would have just commenced secondary school. From the point of view of obtaining longitudinal data there would be advantages in including those Year 3 students who participated in the 1996 Survey who would be in Year 7 in the year 2000. Longitudinal data would enable the effects of resource intensive initiatives such as special school literacy programs and additional classroom support to be analysed. The sample for this survey should be enlarged to enable comparisons by State and Territory. Planning for such a survey should commence as soon as possible.

The 1996 Survey did not have the capacity to investigate the relationship between teaching methodology and literacy achievement. Primary teachers see their professional identity as closely linked to their capacity to teach children to read and write well and they take responsibility for improving literacy outcomes for all children. Further research to clarify the relationship between successful teaching methodologies and socio-economic
status, gender, language background and literacy achievement would assist teachers in their task. While there have been many case studies exploring the appropriateness of teaching methodologies for particular groups of students, macro-research in this area has been limited. On the basis of the evidence from the Survey concerning the wide range of achievement among students, the way in which the spread of student achievement increases as students become older and the concentration of particular sub groups of students among low achievers, the Management Committee recommends that consideration be given by those implementing the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan to the establishment of major research initiatives in the area of literacy teaching methodology to inform the National Plan.

The rich evidence provided in the 1996 Survey illustrates the nature of the range of literacy achievement among students in the middle primary years. For some students, the level of literacy achievement appears to be very low. However, the Survey data just as clearly indicates that the majority of students are achieving well, with many students working well ahead of expectations.

The Management Committee believes that the Report of the Survey adds significantly to our understanding of literacy teaching, learning and achievement and should be carefully read and considered by all those concerned with primary education in Australia.

Yours sincerely

Graham Harrington (Chair)
Evan Arthur
Sharan Burrow
Jim Dellit
Peter Hamilton
Ross Kimber
Harry Payne
David Robertson
Lynne Rolley
Brian Rout
Vin Thomas
Lindsay Wasson
Margaret Willis
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Acknowledgements

The Management Committee wishes to thank the teachers and external assessors who participated in this Survey.
INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

The release of the data from the Survey comes at a time of widespread interest in literacy and the literacy achievements of Australian schoolchildren, and of heightened awareness of the relationship between effective literacy skills and individual life chances. The levels of students’ literacy skills at the end of primary school are an important determinant of their likely success in secondary school and a significant influence on their abilities to capitalise on post-secondary education, training and work opportunities later in life. It is in the early years of primary school that students’ foundational skills in reading and writing are consolidated, their skills in critical listening and viewing develop rapidly, and their speaking competence and confidence develop.

It is widely recognised that proficiency in English literacy is of major importance for each individual’s personal, social and cultural development and that such proficiency also is crucial to the quality of civic and economic contributions to Australian society. Inadequate levels of reading, writing and oral communication have a personal cost in reduced opportunities to participate fully in Australian society and reduced employability when students leave school. The Smith Family’s 1994 report, Australia’s Literacy Challenge,1 drew attention to the link between literacy and poverty levels and the International Literacy Year (ILY) End of Year Report for Australia, Putting Literacy on the Agenda, concluded that the most economically disadvantaged in Australian society tend to be those with the lowest levels of literacy. The ILY Report also referred to the societal cost of inadequate literacy levels and estimated that in Australia the cost to industry of low literacy levels in lost productivity alone was at least $3.2 billion annually and would be much higher if factors such as industrial safety, poor product quality and low job mobility were taken into account.2

The development of strong literacy and numeracy skills, particularly in the early years of primary school, is now seen as an urgent priority by all Australian governments. At their March 1997 meeting, State, Territory and Commonwealth education ministers committed themselves to realising a new goal:

‘that every child leaving primary school should be numerate and able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level’.

To deliver this goal, Ministers endorsed a national plan which focuses on the early years of schooling and includes the development of national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

THE FEDERAL INITIATIVE

From the early 1990’s there has been growing concern among employers, particularly small employers, that school leavers do not possess adequate English literacy skills to meet the increasing demands of the workforce. Until now, the significance of this issue has been difficult to grasp because there were no reliable national data on the levels of English literacy attainment among Australian school students. No major attempt3 has been made to collect such data since 1980, when the Council of Education Ministers repeated the 1975 survey conducted by the House of Representatives Select Committee on Specific Learning Difficulties4 to obtain trend data on literacy and numeracy. By the mid–1990’s most States and Territories had introduced literacy assessment programs in the primary years. However, there are significant methodological differences among these assessment programs, and so it has not been possible to draw firm conclusions from
them about literacy levels across Australia. This lack of reliable national data on literacy has been highlighted by a number of major national reports including the Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *The Literacy Challenge.* This Report considered it unacceptable that the actual numbers of children with literacy problems or special literacy needs are unknown.\(^5\)\(^6\)\(^7\)

In the May 1994 White Paper on Employment, *Working Nation,*\(^8\) the Commonwealth Government allocated approximately $3 million to collect, by the end of 1996, reliable national data on the literacy levels of school students at three significant stages of schooling.

Shortly after coming to office in April 1996, the new Federal Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, Dr David Kemp announced, after consulting with his State and Territory ministerial colleagues and peak non-government school authorities, that the National School English Literacy Survey would take place later in 1996.

**Planning and Managing the Survey**

**Collaboration**

Planning for the Survey was a highly collaborative effort. From the earliest days of planning for the Survey all the key stakeholders in schooling—State and Territory Governments, non-government school authorities, the Federal Government, teacher unions, professional teacher associations, parents and the business sector—were directly involved at a senior level in developing the methodology for the Survey through membership of the National School English Literacy Survey Steering Committee.

Mr Greg Black, then Director-General of Education in Western Australia, chaired the Steering Committee, whose membership is shown in Figure 1. Throughout the planning process, the Steering Committee worked closely with Dr Geoff Masters and Ms Margaret Forster, Australian Council for Educational Research, and seconded literacy and other expertise to assist in its task where necessary.

In May 1996, a Management Committee of stakeholders was established to oversee the implementation of the Survey and report its findings. The Management Committee was convened by Mr Graham Harrington, Deputy Secretary, Tasmanian Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development. Membership of the Management Committee is shown in Figure 2.

Ms Elizabeth Allison of the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs was associated with the Survey for the duration of the project and acted as Executive Officer to both the Steering Committee and the Management Committee and their sub-committees.

The Steering Committee and the Management Committee set up five sub-committees to assist them in their work. These sub-committees brought a wide range of additional expertise to the task and are listed below:

- Trial Management Sub-Committee
- Materials Reference Group
- Professional Development Sub-Committee
- Questionnaire Revision Group
- State/Territory Co-ordinators

Details of their functions and membership appear in the section on Survey Procedures.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory Education Authorities</th>
<th>Name and Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Mr Greg Black, Director-General, Education Department (Chair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>Mr Allan Hird, Executive Director, Schools Programs Branch, Department of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Mr Lindsay Wasson, Director of Curriculum, NSW Department of School Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Dr Harry Payne, Deputy Secretary, Curriculum and Assessment, Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Mr Brian Rout, Director, Studies Directorate, Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Mr Jim Delle, Executive Director Curriculum, Department for Education and Children’s Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Mr Graham Harrington, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education and the Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Mr Ross Harrington, Assistant General Manager, Curriculum Development and Learning Technologies, Department of Education</td>
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<td>Non-Government School Authorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Catholic Education Commission</td>
<td>Dr Brian Croke, Executive Director, Catholic Education Commission, NSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Council of Independent Schools Associations</td>
<td>Mr David Robertson, Executive Director (Operations), Association of Independent Schools, Victoria</td>
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<td>Teacher Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Education Union</td>
<td>Ms Sharan Burrow, Federal President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Education Union of Australia</td>
<td>Ms Lynne Rolley, Federal Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Council of State School Organisations</td>
<td>Ms Pam Cahir, Senior Vice President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Parent Council</td>
<td>Ms Josephine Lonergan, Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/Employers</td>
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<td>National Industry Education Forum</td>
<td>Ms Anne McLeish, Executive Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education and Professional Organisations</td>
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<td>Australian Literacy Federation</td>
<td>Ms Marion Meiers, Executive Liaison Officer</td>
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<td>Australian Language and Literacy Council</td>
<td>Associate Professor Trevor Cairney, Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Paul Brock, Special Adviser,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools Council</td>
<td>Ms Ann Morrow, Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Bill Daniels, First Assistant Secretary, Schools and Curriculum Division, DEET</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Chris Robinson, Assistant Secretary Quality Schooling Branch, Schools and Curriculum Division, DEET</td>
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<td>Executive Officer</td>
<td>Ms Elizabeth Allison, Schools and Curriculum Division, DEET</td>
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**Figure 1 Members of the National School English Literacy Survey Steering Committee (1995)**
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<td>Mr Graham Harrington, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development (Chair)</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Mr Jim Dellit, Executive Director, Curriculum, SA Department for Education and Children’s Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Mr Ross Kimber, Assistant General Manager, Curriculum Development and Learning Technologies, Department of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Mr Peter Hamilton, Director, Executive Support, Education Department of Western Australia</td>
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<th><strong>NON-GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS</strong></th>
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<td>National Catholic Education Commission</td>
<td>Dr Vin Thomas, Co-ordinator, Curriculum and Education, Catholic Education Office, Adelaide</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Council of Independent Schools Associations</td>
<td>Mr David Robertson, Executive Director (Operations), Victorian Association of Independent Schools</td>
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<td>Australian Education Union</td>
<td>Ms Sharan Burrow, Federal President</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent Education Union of Australia</td>
<td>Ms Lynne Rolley, Federal Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executive Officer</td>
<td>Ms Elizabeth Allison, Schools Division, DEETYA</td>
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**Figure 2** Members of the National School English Literacy Survey Management Committee (1996–7)
The assessment methodology that evolved from the work of the Steering Committee had wide support among school authorities, across the teaching profession and in the broader community. This level of support was sustained during the implementation of the Survey. All State and Territory Governments and peak non-government school authorities supported the participation of their teachers and schools in the Survey. National teacher unions and professional teacher associations encouraged their members to participate in the Survey. Literacy experts and academics continued to provide their time and support. Parents’ organisations ensured that parents of participating students understood the nature of their child’s involvement in the Survey.

AIMS OF THE SURVEY AND USES OF THE SURVEY DATA

The Steering Committee negotiated the following broad aims for the Survey:

• to obtain a clear view regarding English literacy levels among Australian school students, identifying those student characteristics associated with different levels of literacy;
• to provide the broad community with reliable information about the literacy skills of Australian school students;
• to enable governments and education authorities to assess literacy needs so that resources can be targeted more effectively; and
• to obtain baseline data so that it is possible to establish national benchmarks against which teachers, schools and systems can assess the effectiveness of current programs and can adjust their goals and programs to improve literacy levels.

It was agreed that the overall purpose of the Survey was to produce a consistent factual analysis of the existing situation to be used as baseline data to monitor national performance over time and to inform strategies to improve literacy in Australian schools.

The assessment methodology used for the Survey, which is described below, has produced the richest picture of the literacy achievements of school students to date in this country. This Report presents achievement data on a comprehensive view of literacy, including reading and writing together with speaking, listening and viewing. It draws on detailed and valid data for students demonstrating achievement across a wide range of literacy levels. These achievement data are enriched by an analysis of those home and school variables which appear to have a significant impact on literacy achievement.

The quality of the data can support a broad range of uses and the sets of analyses presented in this Report are not definitive. Currently the Survey data are being used to inform and facilitate the development of national literacy benchmarks at Year 3 and Year 5 now taking place under the auspices of MCEETYA. System and school authorities also will be able to use the data to inform the development of literacy programs and to assist in the targeting of literacy resources.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE METHODOLOGY FOR THE SURVEY

THE CRITICAL FACTORS

At early meetings of the Steering Committee it was agreed that:

• teacher judgment would be central to the methodology for the Survey;
• the methodology would model good practice in assessing English literacy and enhance the professional skills of participating teachers in the assessment of student achievement in English literacy;
• student performance as described in the English curriculum profile was a good practical indicator of English literacy achievement and provided a useful national framework for the Survey;
• the Survey was to address all three strands of the English profile, ie (1) Reading and Viewing; (2) Speaking and Listening; and (3) Writing;
• a light sample survey was an appropriate vehicle to collect the data.

The underlying aim of the Steering Committee was to develop an assessment methodology which had the capacity to link the richness and validity of classroom assessment practices into the framework of a reliable national data collection process. The assessment methodology that has emerged from this collaborative process involves a new balance between external moderation, objectivity and the input of classroom teachers.

This methodology shares some common features with a number of other assessment programs but is unique in the way it combines:
• the central role of the teacher in the assessment process;
• the collaborative assessment process involving teachers and external assessors;
• the integration of the assessment process with normal classroom practice over the assessment period;
• the degree and intensity of professional development for teachers and external assessors participating in the Survey;
• externally set and moderated tasks and assessment criteria, and students’ best work to assess student achievement.

The 1995 Trial

The Survey methodology was informed by the outcomes of a trial which took place in government and non-government schools in most States and Territories in October and November 1995.

In June 1995, following a public call for tenders, the Australian Council for Educational Research was selected to trial procedures developed by the Steering Committee for collecting data for the Survey. The purpose of the trial was to assess for Years 3, 5 and 10 the reliability, validity and feasibility of two distinct procedures, the basic difference between the two procedures being the amount of structured support provided to assist teachers to assess students’ achievements in English literacy.


Of particular interest was evidence from the trial indicating that practical difficulties such as the secondary timetable were likely to undermine the reliability of the Year 10 data and the feasibility of the procedure. In addition, the Year 10 assessment instruments were not suitable for students and teachers in a number of States and Territories. A considerable amount of new work was required to adapt these instruments and the Steering Committee agreed that it was not possible to develop suitable instruments in time to enable a secondary sample to be part of the 1996 Survey. In reaching this decision the Steering Committee was aware that concern in the business sector about the literacy levels of school leavers was one of the central reasons for conducting the Survey. It recommended that a survey at the secondary level be conducted as soon as possible, utilising a similar methodology to that of the 1996 Survey.
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE AND THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Drawing on ACER’s Report on the 1995 trial, the Steering Committee and the Management Committee made the following recommendations to the Federal Minister about the shape of the Survey. These recommendations were accepted by the Federal Government.

- The following methodology be used to collect student data for the Survey:
  - Each teacher working with an external assessor assess the literacy achievement of ten students in his/her class over a six-week period of time on the basis of
    1. sets of professionally designed assessment tasks covering Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening and Viewing as reflected in the English curriculum profile and
    2. examples of the students’ best class work in Writing and Speaking using assessment criteria based on the English curriculum profile.
  - Data on home and school variables which may influence levels of literacy attained by students be collected through a set of questionnaires designed for teachers, students and principals.
  - External assessors provide individual support for teachers in assessing the achievements of their students.
  - A focused professional development program for external assessors and participating teachers is central to ensuring a high level of reliability for the data emerging from the Survey.
  - The assessment resource materials addressing the English curriculum profile being developed by ACER for the upper and lower primary years be used in the Survey as the Common Tasks because the DART assessment model currently encompasses a broader range of outcomes from the English profile than the other available assessment materials.¹¹
  - Data for both the Common Tasks and the examples of students’ best classroom work (Best Work) be collected in a six week corridor of time in August/September 1996.
  - The 1996 Survey collect data from students in Years 3 and 5 only.
  - Schools, teachers and students be selected at random to participate in the Survey.
  - There be 4 000 students at each year level with additional oversampling for Indigenous students.¹²
  - Data not be disaggregated by government/non-government school sector.
  - The Federal Government commission ACER on the basis of their pre-eminent expertise to:
    - select the sample for the Survey;
    - develop the assessment materials for the Survey;
    - refine the questionnaires collecting data on home and school variables related to literacy;
    - administer the Survey, conduct central reliability checks on the methodology and any required remarking, and analyse the Survey outcomes.
  - The Victorian Directorate of School Education be commissioned to co-ordinate the design and delivery of professional development for the Survey.
  - The Tasmanian Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development be commissioned to administer the teacher relief funds.
teacher trained by *external assessor* in administering and marking Survey tasks and best work and collecting background information

**English Curriculum Profile**

- **Writing**
- **Listening**
- **Speaking**
- **Viewing**
- **Reading**

- **Background**
- **Questionnaires** on Student School and Home Variables

- **National Survey Data Base**

All completed student work, all assessments of that work, and all questionnaire responses returned to ACER for central reliability sampling and analysis.

- **Supporting Teachers’ Assessments**
  - 1. Common Training
  - 2. Common Tasks
  - 3. Reliability Checks

**Figure 3 Survey methodology**
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM PROFILE

The English curriculum profile provided a useful framework for collecting data on English literacy achievement among school students because

• of its focus on the progression of learning;
• of its incorporation into system-level curriculum documents;¹³
• it reflects current definitions of literacy involving the integration of speaking, listening and viewing with reading and writing. It recognises the need to upgrade skills in speaking and listening for participation in the modern work force and with its focus on viewing stresses the increasing importance of visual communication through the media of film and television;
• it highlights a range of different ways in which language is used (e.g., in literature, newspapers and other texts), in selecting appropriate language for a given context, in understanding linguistic structures etc. To be able to demonstrate achievement on the English curriculum profile, students need to acquire considerable knowledge about the nature of a wide range of texts and about the use of language.

Data from the Survey cover a much wider range of curriculum outcomes from the English profile than is possible in most of the State–based cohort assessment programs. This factor underlies the wide range of achievement reported by the Survey.

While the framework of the English curriculum profile has been used as the basis for a number of State-level assessment programs in recent years, its purpose to provide a common language for reporting student achievement across States, Territories and systems has not been tested on this scale before. For the purposes of the Survey, the English curriculum profile worked effectively as a national assessment framework. The Survey data also provided empirical evidence of the validity of the profile levels in the middle primary years, a profile level indicating approximately two years of development across all strands of the profile.

However, the outcomes of the Survey and its earlier trial do indicate that some refinements could be made to improve levels 1 to 5 of the profile. In this context, perhaps the single most significant finding is that reporting for Speaking and Listening should not be combined in a single strand.¹⁴ For the purposes of this Survey, Writing, Reading, Viewing, Speaking and Listening are all reported separately.

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

Sound professional development and marker training were critical to ensuring the reliability of data based on teacher judgment. However, the professional development experience was a major outcome of the Survey in its own right. Involvement in the Survey over a period of approximately two months led to enhanced understandings of literacy assessment among the 1 000 participating teachers and literacy consultants who were spread across all States and Territories and government and non-government school sectors.

Feedback on the professional development experience of the Survey was very positive and is outlined in the Report of the State Co-ordinators in Appendix 1. In particular, the following features were valued:

• the opportunity to participate in a highly focused professional development exercise drawing together learning and assessment in a practical way in the classroom;
• the opportunity for participants to learn and implement new skills, particularly in speaking, listening and viewing;
• for external assessors, the opportunity to work collaboratively on assessment with literacy experts from all States and Territories and from government and non-government systems;
• the high quality and comprehensive nature of the training provided.

Professional development and marker training are described in more detail commencing on page 269.

**Materials for the Survey**

The Steering Committee commissioned ACER to develop the new Year 5 materials for the Survey. The Steering Committee and the Management Committee oversaw ACER’s development of the new materials and examined the appropriateness of the unpublished lower primary DART materials as assessment instruments for the Year 3 Survey. The Committees also oversaw the development of criteria for assessing classroom work. They were assisted in these tasks by curriculum experts drawn from education systems and universities. Further details appear on page 241.

Central reliability checks conducted by ACER with the support of external assessors who participated in the Survey indicated that all common tasks worked adequately as assessment tools. However, feedback from those teachers and students participating in the Survey will enable refinement of the national bank of assessment materials that might be available for future assessment exercises. In this process, particular attention needs to be given to the range of examples in the marking guides for Listening and Viewing and to the lower levels of achievement in Listening and Viewing.

**Special Indigenous Sample**

Because Indigenous students comprise only about 3 percent of the primary school population, oversampling was required to provide reliable national data on Indigenous students as a group. The Survey methodology presented difficulties for oversampling Indigenous students because it required that each teacher assess ten students in her/his class. Only in areas where the Indigenous population is most concentrated are there ten Indigenous students in a single class. The effect of oversampling using this process would have been to draw on the literacy performances of that particular subgroup of Indigenous students living in remote areas.

The Management Committee agreed that Indigenous students should be assessed by their teacher in the same way as other students in the Survey. Following consultations with State/Territory Aboriginal education consultative groups, in July 1996, the Management Committee decided to set up a special sample which would randomly sample all Australian schools with five or more Indigenous students in classes at the required year level. The rationale for this decision was as follows:

• there are no reliable data on the performances of Indigenous students, and Governments wish to obtain these data to inform planning and resource allocation to meet the needs of Indigenous students. The Survey offered a unique opportunity to collect data on the achievements of Indigenous students;
• about 60 per cent of Indigenous students attend schools with five or more Indigenous students in classes;
• such a sample would be biased because the sampled students would be located in those schools where there are considerable numbers of Indigenous students (ie five or more in a class), but it would sample a majority of Indigenous students;
• such a sample would constitute a broad demographic sample of Indigenous students drawing on the achievements of Indigenous students living in remote,
rural and urban areas;
• additional funding was available to support broadening the Indigenous sample.

Because of the way the sample was drawn, the achievement data for the Special Indigenous Sample cannot be interpreted as representative of the achievement levels of all Indigenous students. For this reason, the achievement data for the Special Indigenous Sample and the Main Sample are reported separately.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SURVEY

This was the first major national survey of English literacy in schools for many years. It involved a new methodology and had to be implemented in a very limited timeframe. In this context the implementation of the Survey proceeded smoothly, with relatively few problems. However, there were some practical implementation issues that require consideration and these are set out in the Report of the State Co-ordinators in Appendix 1 on page 303.

Particular attention needs to be paid to the implementation issues surrounding the Special Indigenous Sample. Some aspects of the methodology meant that in practice the Survey was a stressful experience for some of these students and their teachers. This increased stress may not have allowed all students in the Special Indigenous Sample to demonstrate their best performances and may have affected the quantity of data collected for the Special Indigenous Sample.

The Report of the State Co-ordinators (see Appendix 1) makes detailed recommendations about areas where streamlining could occur for future surveys.
NOTES


3 In March 1997, the ACER published a ten-page document titled, ‘Reading and Numeracy in Junior Secondary School: Trends, Patterns and Consequences’ drawing on evidence from 1975 and 1995 samples of Australian students who undertook short tests in basic reading comprehension.

4 The 1975 survey had been designed to estimate the proportions of each age group performing below levels defined to represent minimum competence in literacy and numeracy.


6 This Report estimated, on the basis of the inadequate evidence then available, that up to twenty per cent of Australian children may finish primary schooling with literacy problems and in some primary schools the majority of children may have special literacy needs.


9 Similar to the Western Australian Education Department’s Monitoring Standards in Education Program.

10 External assessors were literacy consultants or experienced teachers and were drawn from States and Territories and government and non-government sectors in appropriate ratio.

11 The common tasks are based on the literacy assessment model established for ACER’s Development Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART).

12 This was the maximum number of students that could be assessed within budget but this sample size did not allow data to be disaggregated reliably by State and Territory.

13 A number of States had already recognised the usefulness of the English profile in designing the more recent assessment programs for collecting State-level data on English literacy, eg

- Western Australia: Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE), sample survey introduced in 1990;
- Victoria: Learning Assessment Project (LAP), full population testing introduced in 1995;
- Queensland Year 6 Test, full population testing introduced in 1995; and
- DART-based programs in Tasmania and the ACT.

14 See page 187 for further details.

15 Theoretically it would have been possible to set up a nationally representative sample of Indigenous students and use an assessment methodology not based on the judgement of the classroom teacher. In practice this would have meant that a different assessment methodology would have been used to collect data on the achievement levels of Indigenous students. The Management Committee rejected this option.
Principles and Findings

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Trevor Johnson
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank the team of ninety external assessors and the nine hundred teachers who participated in the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey. Without them, this study could not have been conducted.

Our thanks also to the Professional Development Sub-Committee, convened by the Victorian Department of Education, which co-ordinated the professional development program for the Survey; and to the Tasmanian Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development which administered the teacher relief funds for the Survey.

We also acknowledge the support and assistance of the Management Committee for the Survey and all expert advisers to the Committee.

Special thanks go to our ACER colleagues on this project.
In each of Years 3 and 5, there is a considerable difference between the literacy achievements of the lowest and highest achieving students. The top 10% of students in each Year are about five Year levels ahead of the bottom 10%.

**Writing**

At the highest level of writing achievement, 5% of Year 5 students show very good control over grammatical structures and punctuation in complex sentences, use precise and effective vocabulary, develop coherent written arguments, and shape their writing to engage the reader. A further 33% of Year 5 students and 12% of Year 3 students use both simple and complex sentences in their writing, use appropriate punctuation most of the time, spell most words correctly, express a clear point of view, and incorporate ideas, details and events into a story-line.

[see pages 26 and 27 and pages 74–80]

At the lowest level of writing achievement, 6% of Year 3 students produce writing which contains some recognisable words, but which can be understood only by that child at the time of writing. A further 35% of Year 3 students and 15% of Year 5 students write in a way which generally can be interpreted by others, which shows some attempt at punctuation, but which shows little shape and may be repetitive (eg ‘then I..., then I..., then I....’).

[see pages 23 and 24 and 68–70]

31% of Year 3 students and 34% of Year 5 students use a computer to write at least once a week.

[see page 216]

Students’ regular classroom writing (which usually includes the processes of drafting, redrafting, and conferencing) reflects higher levels of writing ability than writing completed under more standardised conditions.
At the highest level of reading achievement, 12% of Year 5 students are able to infer meaning from figurative and idiomatic language (eg ‘last but not least’). A further 39% of Year 5 students and 12% of Year 3 students are able to recognise the tone of a piece of writing, select several pieces of information from a complex presentation of text, order detailed events from a narrative, and recognise how linguistic features (such as exclamation marks) support ideas implicit in a text.

[see pages 31–32 and pages 116–118]

At the lowest level of reading achievement, 4% of Year 3 students are able to do little more than predict the likely contents of a storybook from its title and cover illustration. A further 42% of Year 3 students and 21% of Year 5 students are reading at a level at which they are able to recognise the main idea in a paragraph of simple text, to make connections between pieces of factual information, and to predict a plausible ending for an illustrated story.

[see pages 28–29 and 112–113]

73% of Year 3 students and 66% of Year 5 students read books at home every day. 8% of Year 3 students and 12% of Year 5 students read newspapers at home every day.

[see page 213]

At the highest level of viewing achievement, 4% of Year 5 students are able to identify elements contributing to the tone of a film (eg recognise the use of parody), and to explain the appropriateness of a scene with reference to the tone of a film. A further 37% of Year 5 students and 16% of Year 3 students are able to identify film techniques used to establish mood, identify the central significance of a prop, and infer aspects of a film character’s personality.

[see pages 35–36 and pages 137–138]

At the lowest level of viewing achievement, 41% of Year 3 students and 12% of Year 5 students are able to identify and understand a character’s role in a story, to express personal views on a character’s actions, and to recognise a role for an event in a film without understanding its central significance to the story.

[see pages 33 and 132–134]

36% of Year 3 students and 46% of Year 5 students watch more than 3 hours of television or videos outside school hours each weekday.

[see page 220]
**Speaking**

At the highest level of speaking achievement, 5% of Year 5 students are able to present challenging ideas, give considered reasons for their opinions, and begin to engage the audience through language, gesture and tone. A further 38% of Year 5 students and 17% of Year 3 students make spoken presentations which are complete and well organised. They speak clearly and articulately, present a strong point of view, and display a good, consistent sense of audience.

[see pages 40–41 and pages 154–155]

At the lowest level of speaking achievement, 2% of Year 3 students are able to do little more than present a few ideas simply, perhaps inaudibly, in a disjointed and incomplete manner. A further 26% of Year 3 students and 7% of Year 5 students include some key information in their presentation, demonstrate a basic understanding of the speaking task, are audible, but show little sense of addressing the audience.

[see pages 37–38 and 152–153]

**Listening**

At the highest level of listening achievement, 13% of Year 5 students are able to recognise target audiences, and to recognise, from different perspectives, the effect a speaker may have on an audience. A further 47% of Year 5 students and 20% of Year 3 students are able to offer and justify an opinion about spoken text, interpret a speaker’s manner, identify the focus of an interview and generate relevant additional questions, and identify sound effects used to create mood.

[see pages 44–45 and pages 174–176]

At the lowest level of listening achievement, 15% of Year 3 students and 4% of Year 5 students are able to do little more than identify key information in a brief spoken text, follow spoken instructions, and select and record essential information. A further 65% of Year 3 students and 36% of Year 5 students are able to recognise a speaker’s manner, find evidence to support a conclusion, recall details of a spoken text, and infer a speaker’s point of view.

[see pages 42–43 and 172–174]

**Attitudes to Literacy**

Students’ enjoyment of writing in class declines between Year 3 and Year 5. The percentage of students who like writing in class ‘a lot’ declines from 44% in Year 3 to 29% in Year 5.

[see page 217]

Students’ enjoyment of reading in class declines between Year 3 and Year 5. The percentage of students who like reading in class ‘a lot’ declines from 48% in Year 3 to 37% in Year 5.

[see page 215]
Students’ enjoyment of watching films and videos in class declines between Year 3 and Year 5. The percentage of students who like watching films and videos ‘a lot’ declines from 64% in Year 3 to 55% in Year 5.

Students’ enjoyment of telling things to others in class declines slightly between Year 3 and Year 5. The percentage of students who like speaking in class ‘a lot’ declines from 34% in Year 3 to 27% in Year 5.

Students’ enjoyment of listening to stories being told or things being read in class declines between Year 3 and Year 5. The percentage of students who like these activities ‘a lot’ declines from 63% in Year 3 to 50% in Year 5.

**Subgroup Performances**

In each aspect of literacy—writing, reading, viewing, speaking, and listening—girls outperform boys. The average gender difference is greatest in writing and least in viewing. There is no significant reduction of the gender difference between Year 3 and Year 5.

Students from a language background other than English have, on average, lower English literacy levels than students from English-speaking backgrounds.

Children of parents from upper professional and managerial occupations have significantly higher average levels of literacy achievement than children of parents from clerical and skilled manual occupations, who in turn have higher average levels of literacy achievement than children of parents from unskilled, manual occupations. The differences between the literacy achievements of children from the highest and lowest occupational categories do not decline between Year 3 and Year 5.

The difference between boys’ and girls’ levels of literacy achievement are greater among children from unskilled and manual occupations than among children from other socio-economic groups.

**Special Indigenous Sample**

Students in the Special Indigenous Sample (drawn from schools with at least five Indigenous students in each of Years 3 and 5) have very low average levels of English literacy achievement (3 to 4 Year levels below students in the main sample).
At both Year 3 and Year 5, there is a considerable difference between the literacy achievements of the lowest and highest achieving students in the Special Indigenous Sample. Students with the highest levels of literacy skill in Year 3 appear to make good progress between Year 3 and Year 5, but there is consistent evidence across all aspects of literacy that students with very low levels of literacy skill in Year 3 make little or no progress over the following two years.

Students in the Special Indigenous Sample have relatively high rates of absence from school (average of 18 days per year compared with 6 days per year for all students), and this higher rate of absence appears to be a factor in the lower literacy achievements of these students.

71% of students in the Special Indigenous Sample always speak English at home (81% of students in the main sample always speak English at home). The English literacy achievements of students in the Special Indigenous Sample increase with the frequency of speaking English at home.

**Differences Between Schools**

Schools differ markedly in average levels of literacy achievement. There appear to be a number of factors associated with higher levels of literacy achievement in schools.

Students in schools where teachers make greater use of the school library with their classes tend to have higher levels of literacy achievement.

Students in schools where teachers make greater use of school computers with their classes tend to have higher levels of literacy achievement.

Students taught by teachers with greater teaching experience tend to have higher levels of literacy achievement.

Students in urban schools tend to have higher levels of literacy achievement than students in rural schools.
Differences Between Students

- Within schools, students differ markedly in their levels of literacy achievement. There appear to be a number of factors associated with students’ higher levels of literacy achievement.
  [see pages 209–210]
- Students who report higher levels of enjoyment of literacy activities in class tend to have higher levels of literacy achievement.
  [see page 209]
- Students who seek help less often with homework tend to have higher levels of literacy achievement.
  [see page 209]
- Students who report doing homework frequently have higher levels of literacy achievement.
  [see page 209]

Details of Student Achievement

Details of students’ achievements in Writing, Reading, Viewing, Speaking and Listening are shown on pages 23–45. These samples of student work illustrate Year 3 and Year 5 literacy achievements and are accompanied by the percentages of students working at each level of the English profile.
Students working at this level typically are able to:
- use some basic conventions (e.g., write from left to right, put spaces between words);
- produce some known words, or words represented by their initial letter;
- use some correct initial letters and other sounds;
- produce writing which...
  - can be read back by the child at the time of writing;
  - consists of a list of unrelated ideas and events;
  - consists of one or two sentences with little development or shape;
  - consists of words dictated to a scribe;
  - consists of a drawing with a few words or word-like symbols.

6% of Year 3 students are working at or below this level.

Finding

I need a Griffin and we fierce
over to Sommertime and I see my mom
eat wess fien
and on the way we see a bird
Nancy gives Biehl's and Sibs.
Principles and Findings
Mapping Literacy Achievement

35% of Year 3 students are working at this level.
15% of Year 5 students are working at or below this level.

WRITING LEVEL 2
Students working at this level typically are able to:

• use simple sentences;
• use simple conjunctions (eg ‘and’ and ‘but’);
• control common punctuation some or all of the time (eg capital letters, full stops);
• spell high frequency words correctly most of the time;
• write in a way that generally can be interpreted by others;
• produce writing which shows a basic understanding of the task but which...
  contains a repetitive sentence structure;
  suggests a plot but lacks coherence (eg incomplete, gaps in the story logic);
  contains irrelevant details;
  shows little shape (eg brief or long and disjointed, repetitive, strays from task);
  relies on assertion rather than argument;
  relies heavily on the provided prompt (eg copies phrases);
  incorporates two or more ideas with little development.

Finding
There was a boy how went for a walk he saw a van so he did not cross the road because there was a van coming. the van went and he cross the road. With Ben was the dog. They were coming home from school that is how he had his bag on his neck.

Bigfoot only got shot be discern he told run very fast. then he went to a jungle and he jumped on a branch then he fell then people came and said, “oh no that. And when he walk up he find his dad. Then he swim.
Main Findings

47% of Year 3 students are working at this level.
47% of Year 5 students are working at this level.

**WRITING LEVEL 3**

Students working at this level typically are able to:

- control simple sentence structure and make an attempt at more complex structures;
- make an attempt to vary sentence beginnings;
- attempt to shape piece structurally (e.g., notion of beginning and end);
- spell many common words correctly;
- write legibly;
- produce writing which shows some evidence of planning, revising and proofreading;
- shape a distinguishable story-line in a narrative;
- produce writing which identifies key events, main characters and settings in a narrative;
- express opinions based on personal experience;
- produce writing with a degree of coherence (e.g., logical sequence of events), but which...
  - displays little sense of conscious control of content;
  - comments on issues briefly and superficially;
  - uses a narrow range of ideas (e.g., incorporates a few inter-related thoughts);
  - defines characters minimally (e.g., characters are given names).

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**Example Texts**

- **Finding**
  - where Jack had got out when he had fixed the fence he went around the front to see what the post man had brung. It was a parcel that had confidential keep out private on it. I picked it up and took it in side. I didn't open it untill mum got home and asked her if I could open it. It was lots and lots of little boxes in side untill in a little box there lied a cristel dimond ring I cannot.

- **Sample Writing**
  - Mountain Adventure
  - One Trent and I went on a plane trip to Texas. We were going to go mountain climbing on the way the plane crashed on a high mountain. Suddley a huge creature appeared kind of like a fox crossed with an eagle. It said I am Griffin.
PRINCIPLES AND FINDINGS
MAPPING LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

WRITING LEVEL 4
Students working at this level typically are able to:

- use some organisational conventions (eg general introductory statement to a report);
- use a variety of sentence forms (eg simple and complex sentences);
- use appropriate punctuation most of the time;
- shape writing with a clear beginning and end, and possibly paragraph divisions;
- use appropriate vocabulary most of the time;
- spell most words correctly;
- produce writing to express a clear point of view;
- imitate or parody genre (eg mystery narrative);
- develop a few related arguments;
- display some degree of critical distance;
- incorporate some detailed reflection on personal experience;
- incorporate ideas, details and events most of which contribute to the story-line;
- incorporate prompts plausibly (eg visual narrative prompt);
- develop characterisation (explicitly or implicitly);
- consider impact on audience (eg explore aspects of surprise, humour, suspense).

Finding
12% of Year 3 students are working at or above this level.
33% of Year 5 students are working at this level.

Karen's adventure with Big Foot
One day when I was coming back from the shops, I saw a poster that I hadn't noticed when I walked up. It read: 'Large Animal Loose In Wagga Wagga! Wow! I thought to myself, I read through and its name was Big Foot. It also said Big Foot came when it was called and can make itself invisible. Scientists are still wondering whether it has any magical powers. There is also a...

Vroom - oops! A delivery van stopped at Jack's house across the road. Jack was excited; his family had never got a parcel. Whoosh! It was a mysterious wind that blew around Jack, and Bengie as if it was holding them back, telling him not to cross the road. Vroom, the van had gone but the wind had not. Bengie stopped barking, Jack sighed with relief.
Main Findings

WRITING LEVEL 5

Students working at this level typically are able to:

- revise writing to be consistent in content and style;
- experiment with rearranging sentences;
- control grammatical structures and punctuation in complex sentences;
- organise writing into a coherent whole appropriate to context (eg paragraphs for a narrative, headings and subheadings for informational text);
- use precise and effective vocabulary;
- approximate the spelling of particularly difficult words using patterns and conventions;
- develop a sustained and integrated narrative (eg time order, consistent point of view, appropriate structure);
- develop a coherent argument justifying a point of view;
- use detailed evidence to support a point of view;
- develop characterisation convincingly (eg discuss motives, feelings);
- show a developed sense of audience;
- shape writing to effectively engage reader.

5% of Year 5 students are working at or above this level.

It was a crisp winter morning and I was just arriving home from the park with my younger brother James and dog Max. James was sulking along behind me not wanting to leave the bright colours of the park equipment behind. We were just coming around the corner when I spotted a post van ambling along the road towards us. I thought that someone must be having a birthday or anniversary party or something like that and tried to think of who it might be but without luck. Much to my surprise the van stopped outside our house. I caught a glimpse of a man with a large parcel.

One fine sunny day, James was walking home from the bus stop when his dog Fido met him at the corner. As James and Fido headed for home, James saw the special delivery van pull up outside his house. James was very curious as his family rarely had parcels. He started to walk a little faster in order to be the first to the parcel. Fido started to pull on the lead that James had clipped onto him. He finally broke free and had a good sniff at the parcel. As James neared the house he broke
**Finding**

4% of Year 3 students are working at or below this level.

**READING LEVEL 1**

Students working at this level typically are able to:

- use a book title and illustration to identify key elements of a story.

Teacher says:

“Think about the story that might be in this book. Write two or three sentences to tell the story.”

Note: For the purposes of the Reading assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.
Main Findings

42% of Year 3 students are working at this level.
21% of Year 5 students are working at or below this level.

**READING LEVEL 2**

Students working at this level typically are able to:

- recognise text genre from book titles;
- interpret a picture to predict what happens next in an illustrated story;
- recognise the main idea in a paragraph of factual text;
- make connections between pieces of factual information in a simple text;
- predict a plausible ending for an illustrated story;
- recognise how elements of an illustration support text in a story;
- decide whether a piece of writing is fact or fiction based on described events.

**Finding**

24 Circle the book you would find the Make Your Own Pop Up Folktale instructions in.

- Aesop’s Fables
- Craft Ideas
- Pigs
- Facts about pigs
- Making Soft Toys

**Note:** For the purposes of the Reading assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.

Some iguanas live in trees while some prefer to stay on the ground. Although they look fierce, most iguanas are vegetarians. They eat fruit, leaves and other parts of plants. Iguanas living on beaches even eat seaweed.

**Extract**

Most iguanas are vegetarians. This means that they only eat fruit and vegetables.

Most iguanas are vegetarians. This means that they fruit leaves and other parts of plants.
Principles and Findings
Mapping Literacy Achievement

42% of Year 3 students are working at this level.
28% of Year 5 students are working at this level.

What did the people of Basilan Island do when they saw the solar eclipse?

**READING LEVEL 3**

Students working at this level typically are able to:

- interpret factual information;
- extract information from a complex presentation of text and pictures;
- recognise conventional linguistic features (e.g., pronunciation guides);
- work out the meaning of an unknown word from context and picture clues;
- recognise the relationship between two pieces of text;
- generate a research question to explore a topic about which they have read;
- find evidence to support a statement in text;
- order instructions in a procedure;
- infer a missing step in a procedure.

Note: For the purposes of the Reading assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.
**Finding**

12% of Year 3 students are working at or above this level.
39% of Year 5 students are working at this level.

**READING LEVEL 4**

*Students working at this level typically are able to:*
- recognise the tone of a simple poem;
- recognise how linguistic features (eg exclamation marks) support ideas implicit in a text;
- select several pieces of information from a complex presentation of text;
- recognise a probable context for a piece of writing;
- explain an author’s point of view;
- order detailed events from a narrative.

---

**Does the writer think the mosquito is lovely?**

*Explain your answer.*

---

**Lovely Mosquito**

Lovely mosquito, attacking my arm
As quiet and still as a statue,
Stay right where you are! I'll do you no harm—
I simply desire to pat you.

Just puncture my veins and swallow your fill
For nobody's going to swot you.
Now, lovely mosquito, stay perfectly still—
A SWIPE! and a SPLAT! and I GOT YOU!

Doug MacLeod

---

**No because he is just trying to be nice to it so he can kill it.**

---

**Why are there exclamation marks at the end of the ODD SPOT piece of writing?**

---

**extract**

Convinced he was being signalled by an intelligent alien life form, he began an in-depth investigation – only to find he was picking up signals from the microwave in the canteen downstairs!!

---

Because it was silly and stupid because it was only a microwave.

---

Note: For the purposes of the Reading assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.
12% of Year 5 students are working at or above this level.

**Finding**

Why was the space thing ‘Last, but not least’?

**extract**

Last, but not least, we needed a ‘spacething’. A friend of mine played around with various bits and pieces and came up with a remarkable and peculiar ‘spacething’ – which also grated cheese!

It was the last thing
they needed but most important

Because it was last but not the least important

The article on radio telescopes says in this way astronomers can ‘see’ what is happening in space.

Why is the word ‘see’ in inverted commas?

**RADIO TELESCOPES**

One way of exploring the Universe from the Earth’s surface is by radio telescope. Many objects in space, exploding galaxies for example, give out energy in the form of radio waves. These waves penetrate the Earth’s atmosphere and can be picked up by radio dishes like the one at Parkes, NSW. In this way astronomers can ‘see’ what is happening in space.

So you know they can’t really see it but have an idea of what it looks like.

Because they can’t actually see but can see through the telescope.

Note: For the purposes of the Reading assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.
Main Findings

41% of Year 3 students are working at this level.
12% of Year 5 students are working at or below this level.

VIEWING LEVEL 2
Students working at this level typically are able to:
- identify and understand a character’s role in a story;
- express personal views on a character’s actions;
- recognise a role for an event in a film without understanding its central narrative significance;
- explain a simple connection of events;
- recognise a cause of conflict in a story;
- explain the concluding scene in a film in terms of peripheral detail only;
- recall some steps in a procedure;
- resolve an element of a narrative by attending to peripheral detail only;
- order pictures from a film sequence;
- identify a central film prop;
- recall some film details.

Note: For the purposes of the Viewing assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.

Finding

Why does the lion king call a meeting?
Because the night was too long

because owl won’t wake the sun.

In the forest, it was Mother Owl’s job to hoot and call the Sun up

2 In the forest, it was Mother Owl’s job to wake up the Sun.

Because the mother owl didn’t wake the sun
42% of Year 3 students are working at this level.
47% of Year 5 students are working at this level.

**VIEWING LEVEL 3**

Students working at this level typically are able to:

- identify some devices used to symbolise emotion;
- recognise how different perspectives on an event are represented;
- predict a narrative ending by attending to the central theme of a film;
- identify some techniques used to establish mood in a film;
- explain the concluding scene in a film by reference to the plot;
- identify a key idea in a short children’s film;
- explain a text detail by referring to its immediate context only;
- construct plausible arguments for different points of view;
- recognise that voice-overs are used as a narrative device;
- predict basic verbal instructions for a filmed procedure.

List three ways that the film makers have made Python seem scary.

1. by putting fire over her
2. by making her hiss
3. by showing her her teeth

- fire was around his head
- he had long teeth
- he had scary eyes

Why do we see both of these pictures in the story? Explain your answer.

The twig broke under him
killing the owl. The other picture is what the animals image

Note: For the purposes of the Viewing assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.
Suppose that the film makers could have used any car they wanted in the film.

Why do you think they chose this type of car for Mrs Flinders?

This car suits Mrs Flinders because the car is weird and so is Mrs Flinders.

Because the Flinders family look dirty
So does there car.

Why does this story start with the sun rising?

Because there showing what owl does for her job and its the begining of the day.

Note: For the purposes of the Viewing assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not spelling, punctuation or grammar.
VIEWING
LEVEL 5

Students working at this level typically are able to:

• recognise that voice-overs can be used to give a particular perspective;

• explain the appropriateness of a concluding scene with reference to the tone of a film;

• explain a text detail in terms of its contribution to text structure (eg music to open and close a film);

• identify elements contributing to the tone of a film (eg recognise the use of parody).

Why does the film use a voice-over (the person telling the story) to tell you some parts of the story?

Because sometimes someone is thinking about something and the voice-over tells the viewers what that person is thinking.

The reason is because it would be hard for the character to tell the audience what is going on himself.

Near the end of the film we see Mr and Mrs Flinders, Nina and Jason having spaghetti together. The voice-over says, ‘It was sort of...happily ever...you know.’

Why doesn’t the voice say, ‘It was happily ever after’?

Because they usually say it in fairy-tales. And because it wasn’t a happily ever after ending.

Note: For the purposes of the Viewing assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.
Main Findings

2% of Year 3 students are working at or below this level.

Students drew a scene incorporating their favourite character from a film they were shown and then spoke about their choice to the class.

My picture’s... like...um... he puts sticks in his ears.

**SPEAKING LEVEL 1**

*Students working at this level typically are able to:*

- express ideas simply and to convey limited meaning (eg using ‘and’ and ‘then’ and repeating words);
- present a talk which contains some unrelated ideas (may need prompting);
- is disjointed or incomplete (may need prompting);
- demonstrates a limited understanding of the speaking task (may stray from original intent);
- demonstrates a limited understanding of the need to communicate with the audience;
- is inaudible at times.
Students drew a scene incorporating their favourite character from a film they were shown and then spoke about their choice to the class.

Um.. my favourite character is rabbit because he is a fast runner and he is a goodie (giggles).

---

**SPEAKING LEVEL 2**

*Students working at this level typically are able to:*

- tell a story with a recognisable plot;
- offer one or two comments or opinions, but with little or no justification;
- include some key information;
- demonstrate a basic understanding of a speaking task;
- give a presentation which:
  - is audible but shows little sense of addressing audience (e.g., may be little eye contact where culturally appropriate);
  - is largely incomplete or long and unstructured (some content may be irrelevant);
  - displays little attempt to modulate voice.
**SPEAKING LEVEL 3**

Students working at this level typically are able to:

- tell a complete story with a logical plot but lacking in detail;
- give a full account of a character, experience or event including all key information;
- show some evidence of organisation (presentation may be muddled or incomplete);
- justify an opinion with mostly descriptive information;
- offer a few arguments, mostly assertions;
- speak clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation), with good natural expression but with little awareness of the audience.

Finding

55% of Year 3 students are working at this level.
50% of Year 5 students are working at this level.

Students drew a scene incorporating their favourite character from a film they were shown and then spoke about their choice to the class.

My favourite character is the owl because the owl woke up the sun every day. And my picture shows when the rabbit and the monkey and everything and the stick landed on the bird, and him dying, and the snake and the rabbit getting out of his hole. And I thought the baddie...um... the baddie was the mosquito because he bothered everyone and no-one liked him and the iguana put sticks in his ears to ignore him.
Students drew a scene incorporating their favourite character from a film they were shown and then spoke about their choice to the class.

Good afternoon. Um... my picture...um... is showing where the lizard’s drinking water and the mosquito’s coming to bother it and to tell it lies, and the iguana puts sticks in its ears. And I think that the... um... mosquito shouldn’t have told lies but it wasn’t necessarily at fault for doing all the rest and everything. And... um...I think the lion was a wonderful, a good character because he helped solve the problem and helped everyone to figure out and he didn’t blame anyone until he found out the person who actually did it. And I liked, I liked the monkey as well as the iguana because I liked the way it broke the branch and it fell on the owl, and that’s all.

SPEAKING LEVEL 4

Students working at this level typically are able to:

- present a complete and well-organised account (e.g., a well-rounded story including details);
- attempt to justify assertions (e.g., “It’s a funny show because of the way...”);
- attempt to generalise about aspects of a topic (e.g., include a synopsis of a show, as opposed to retelling one episode);
- present a strong point of view (e.g., about a favourite character);
- speak clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation), with good natural expression;
- display a good, consistent sense of audience.
The bit that I picked was the last one and I picked it because I thought it talked about the poorer people and I’m really concerned about them ‘cos they’re less fortunate than us. Um, a bit that John Paul said he thought was funny was that he only took the loaf of bread. Because the man was really hungry so he didn’t take anything valuable. He knew he couldn’t sell it and so he just took the loaf of bread. The last bit says, ‘Sitting by the fire I made toast, two buttered pieces each, but I couldn’t eat for thoughts of the hungry man keeping warm with sheep.’ As I said before, I chose it because it talks about the poorer people in our community that haven’t got enough to eat. They keep warm -- well this was the olden days-- so he would keep warm, -- and this was the country-- by being near the sheep.
15% of Year 3 students are working at or below this level.
4% of Year 5 students are working at or below this level.

Peter thinks that folktales are not for babies.

**Finding**

- 15% of Year 3 students are working at or below this level.
- 4% of Year 5 students are working at or below this level.

**Listening**

**Level 2**

Students working at this level typically are able to:
- identify key information in a brief spoken text;
- follow spoken instructions to complete simple drawings;
- select and record essential information;
- listen to other speakers and reflect on their presentations;
- recognise a character’s feelings or opinion in spoken text.

**Audiotape Transcript**

‘... I don’t think folktales are for babies because babies can’t really understand the books we’ve been reading. Like legends, they’re pretty hard to understand. The words in them are too hard for babies to read...’

Peter thinks this because **little kids can’t understand it and read big words.**

Peter thinks this because **the words in them are hard for babies.**

Aunty Iris said, ‘The Bunyip would get you’.
What did she think the Bunyip would do?

**Audiotape Transcript**

‘... and we were often told not to go to the river because the Bunyip would get you if you went there on your own. So we were very careful not to go to these places where we thought he would be because if the Bunyip got you, well that was the finish -- he’d drag you under the water and things like that....’

**pol you under water then eat you**

**grab you and take you underwater and you would drown**

Note: For the purposes of the Listening assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.
Main Findings

65% of Year 3 students are working at this level. 36% of Year 5 students are working at this level.

**LISTENING LEVEL 3**

Students working at this level typically are able to:

- identify key differences in related spoken texts;
- find evidence to support a conclusion;
- recognise a speaker’s manner (e.g. confident, shy);
- identify some features distinguishing formal from informal speech;
- recognise that speakers are chosen to have an effect on an audience;
- select from competing instructions to complete simple drawings;
- identify how speaking is adjusted in different situations;
- infer a speaker’s point of view (e.g. predict their likely response);
- recall details of a spoken text;
- offer an opinion about spoken text (e.g. evaluate an advertisement).

‘Grandma’ is talking in one ad and ‘Grandpa’ is talking in the other.
What is the main difference between the two ads?

| Grandma’s ad is about how clean the river is. | Grandpa’s ad is about how yucky & smelly the river is |

Do you think Aunty Iris would tell her children the story of the Bunyip?
Explain your answer.

Yes, because to keep her children safe.
Yes, to keep them safe of the deep water.

Note: For the purposes of the **Listening** assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.
Principles and Findings
Mapping Literacy Achievement

20% of Year 3 students are working at or above this level.
47% of Year 5 students are working at this level.

What question would you like to ask Aunty Iris to find out more about the Bunyip?

I would like to ask her two questions. Has she ever seen the Bunyip? Is the Bunyip still alive?

does it have sharp teeth and a big mouth?

Note: For the purposes of the Listening assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.
LISTENING LEVEL 5

Students working at this level typically are able to:

- interpret aspects of content and register to distinguish between speakers;
- recognise a particular target audience in advertising;
- recognise, from different perspectives, the effect a speaker may have on an audience.

The RAP-AD was made in rap style.
Why do you think it was made in this style?

Because children like rap music, so they listen to it.

Do you think it was a good idea to use children to make these ads?
Explain your answer, giving as many reasons as you can.

Yes because some adults will just give boring answers but these children could still give us the information in a creative way.

Yes because they have good imaginations. If the river it polluted it will affect them. People will listen to them.

Note: For the purposes of the Listening assessment, students’ responses are assessed for understanding, not for spelling, punctuation or grammar.
The National School English Literacy Survey was designed around a number of guiding principles. Six key principles were:

- inferences about the literacy achievements of Year 3 and Year 5 students should be based on the performances of a nationally representative sample of students at these two Year levels;
- Survey procedures should provide valid information about students’ literacy achievements by addressing a broad range of literacy skills, by collecting varied evidence including students’ performances on meaningful literacy tasks, and by drawing on the professional expertise of classroom teachers;
- Survey procedures should provide reliable information about students’ literacy achievements by ensuring that data are collected in similar ways in different schools (including data collected under controlled conditions) and by assisting teachers to apply the same criteria and standards in assessing student performances;
- information about students’ literacy achievements should be accompanied by information about the contexts in which literacy learning occurs in schools, and an attempt made to understand possible influences on levels of literacy achievement;
- the Survey should include a special Indigenous sample to provide additional information about the literacy achievements of a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and
- the Survey results should be reported as informatively as possible, providing achievement measures which are interpreted descriptively, displayed pictorially, and interpreted in relation to the English profile for Australian schools.

These six principles guided all aspects of the Survey, including the sample design, the development of Survey assessment materials and questionnaires, the training of participating teachers, the analysis of the Survey data, and the writing of this report.

2.1 Nationally Representative Samples

A first principle guiding the National School English Literacy Survey was that information concerning students’ levels of literacy achievement should be based on the performances of nationally representative samples of Year 3 and Year 5 students. The assessment of random samples of students is standard practice in national surveys of this kind. Sample surveys allow trends in achievement levels to be studied over time and the performances of major subgroups of the student population to be compared and monitored. They also allow relationships between school, teacher and student characteristics and levels of student achievement to be researched. Sample surveys usually are conducted in different areas of the school curriculum on a cycle in which achievements in each learning area are re-surveyed every few years.

Several Australian States have used sample surveys to monitor student achievement. These surveys include the Queensland Assessments of Student Performance, the Victorian Achievement Studies in literacy, numeracy and science, and the Western Australian Monitoring Standards in Education program in literacy, numeracy, science, studies of society and the environment, the arts, health and physical education. Each of these programs has constructed survey instruments and administered them to representative samples of students. Sample surveys are different from the annual full-cohort assessment programs which now operate in most States and Territories of Australia in that full-cohort programs are designed not only to monitor trends in population and subgroup achievements over
time, but also to provide schools and parents with detailed information about the performances of individual students.

Sample surveys usually address a broader range of learning outcomes than full-cohort assessment programs, which tend to focus on a relatively limited range of basic skills.

Two national sample surveys, known as the Australian Studies of Student Performance, were conducted in Australia in 1975 and 1980 to collect data on the literacy and numeracy achievements of 10 and 14 year-olds, but these national surveys were not continued:

The OECD survey (1991) revealed that a high proportion (but not all) of its member states had instituted a national monitoring system of student achievement or a new system, usually in or after the mid 1970s. Examples are England and Wales (with Northern Ireland also participating), France, Finland, the Netherlands, Spain, Scotland, and Sweden. Most Canadian provinces have similar monitoring systems, but there is no single national system of monitoring in Canada. While systems have evolved and changed over time (radically in the UK), there appears to be only one case—Australia—where national monitoring has been started but not continued. (Nuttall, 1985)

More recently, a national survey of the mathematics and science achievements of primary and secondary school students was conducted as part of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (Lokan et al, 1996). The national sample for this study was designed to allow reliable comparisons of students’ mathematics and science achievements with performances in other participating countries and across different Australian States and Territories.

The purpose of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey was to collect national baseline data on literacy achievements, allowing levels of literacy achievement to be monitored over time, and to provide information about literacy learning contexts in primary schools. The data collected through the Survey were intended to provide summary data at the national level only. The majority of the members of the Steering Committee for the Survey agreed that the sample be drawn in such a way that reliable State/Territory comparisons could not be made. Subsequently, Ministers agreed that the sample size of all future surveys should be large enough to enable reliable State/Territory comparisons. The Survey sampling procedures are described in detail on pages 247–250.

2.2 Valid Achievement Data

A second principle guiding the Survey was that data collection procedures should seek to maximise the validity of the resulting literacy achievement data. In practice, this meant ensuring that literacy assessment materials: (i) addressed a broad definition of literacy; (ii) were developed to address outcomes from the English profile; (iii) involved meaningful, thematic, and integrated tasks; (iv) were carefully scrutinised to ensure their appropriateness for different subgroups of students; (v) provided a mix of evidence, including both point-in-time and classroom evidence; and (vi) involved teacher judgement of students’ responses and work.

Broad definition of literacy

In the past, ‘literacy’ sometimes has been defined as the ability to read and write, and the term ‘literate’ used to denote competence in written rather than spoken language. Minimal reading ability without writing ability or the ability only to write one’s name was often referred to as basic literacy. Recent use of the term ‘literacy’ suggests a more complex interpretation, and the basic distinction the original definition drew between written and spoken language is becoming blurred.
The concept of functional literacy, although not universally accepted, has been used internationally. It recognises that literacy exists in context:

People are functionally literate who can engage in those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in their group and community and also for enabling them to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for their own and their communities' development. (DEET, 1991, p. 34)

The National Goals for Schooling in Australia proposed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers of Education in 1989 set the goal of developing in students ‘skills of English literacy, including skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing’ (DEET, 1991, p. 35).

The Policy Directions Paper for the 1990 International Literacy Year Program in Australia referred to the concept of active literacy:

For an advanced technological society, such as Australia, our goal must be an active literacy which allows people to use language to enhance their capacity to think, create and question, which helps them to participate more effectively in society. (DEET, 1991, p. 35)

The following definition of literacy adopted by the Australian Language and Literacy Policy refers to the concept of effective literacy:

Literacy is the ability to read and use written information appropriately, in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society. Literacy also includes the recognition of numbers and basic mathematical signs and symbols within text.

Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening, and critical thinking with reading and writing. Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and continues to develop throughout an individual's lifetime. (DEET, 1991, p. 9)

In line with this shift in emphasis from a limited definition of literacy, the National School English Literacy Survey is based on a broad definition of literacy (as above) which includes writing, reading, viewing, speaking, and listening. Under this definition, literacy is seen as more than a set of basic skills necessary for survival and competent functioning in society. Literacy also is seen to include an awareness and critical understanding of how language is used and of the important role that context plays in determining the meaning of communications.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE ENGLISH PROFILE FOR AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Although the English profile was developed to describe progressive achievement in the English learning area, the Survey Steering Committee concluded that the strands and outcomes of the profile would provide a useful framework for assessing general English literacy.

The English profile was developed in the period 1990–93 as part of a collaborative effort of all States and Territories and the Commonwealth to develop ‘statements’ and ‘profiles’ for eight areas of the school curriculum. Each curriculum statement defines a learning area, outlines its essential elements, shows what is distinctive about that area, and describes a sequence for developing students’ knowledge and skills. The accompanying profile is a framework for reporting student achievement.

Individual States and Territories have incorporated these documents into system-level initiatives. In some cases, systems have undertaken revisions of the statements and profiles and produced their own versions. In other systems, the statements and profiles have been distributed and used in their original form. A detailed analysis of changes made to the English profile in State/Territory revisions was undertaken by ACER in 1995 and showed that changes to this profile had at that time been minimal, meaning that...
across much of Australia, there was a common frame of reference for describing and assessing students’ levels of English literacy.

Several States have aligned their sample surveys and/or full-cohort assessment programs with profile frameworks. Survey instruments developed for the Western Australian Monitoring Standards in Education program, for example, address outcomes identified in the WA Outcome Statements (Western Australia’s version of the Profiles) and student achievement is reported in terms of Outcome levels. Similarly, instruments developed for Victoria’s Learning Assessment Project address outcomes identified in the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF), and student achievement is reported against the strands and levels of the CSF framework.

The assessments made as part of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey were designed to provide evidence in relation to the writing, reading, viewing, speaking, and listening outcomes of the English curriculum profile. Students’ performances are reported separately in these five areas of literacy achievement although the English profile framework is structured around three strands: Reading and viewing, Speaking and listening, and Writing (see pages 255–261).

MEANINGFUL, THEMATIC, INTEGRATED LITERACY TASKS

Many sample surveys are based on a limited range of information about student achievements. Some programs use paper and pen instruments as the primary or sole source of information, and these often are limited to machine-scored tests. Usually, tasks are unrelated to each other or to normal classroom contexts. In the National School English Literacy Survey an attempt was made to enhance the validity of the Survey data by using varied assessment evidence, including open-ended questions, limited portfolio assessments, and assessments of oral language performance requiring teacher observation and judgement. Tasks were presented in integrated settings, with the intention that they could be embedded in teachers’ curricula and accompanied by thematic scaffolding activities for students.

The Survey Steering Committee decided to base the Survey tasks on the literacy assessment model established for ACER’s Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART). Literacy tasks for Year 3 students were based on a ‘myths and legends’ theme with writing, reading, viewing, speaking, and listening tasks loosely integrated around a central videotape and picture book. Literacy tasks for Year 5 students were built around a film entitled ‘Looking for Space Things’.

APPROPRIATENESS FOR SUBGROUPS

An important aspect of the development of the Survey assessment materials was the process of checking that the materials and procedures were accessible to, and appropriate for, major subgroups of the student population. In an attempt to ensure that all materials were fair to these subgroups, the Survey Management Committee established a Materials Reference Group to work with ACER in reviewing the materials as they were developed. The Reference Group included literacy experts and representatives of multicultural education associations, teachers of English as a second language, and Indigenous education groups (see page 241 for a complete list of the members of the Materials Reference Group). The assessment tasks were designed to be as appropriate as possible for all students.
Point-in-time and Classroom Work

It is common in large-scale surveys to limit the assessment evidence to students’ performances on specially constructed, standardised tasks. These tasks, which often are limited to paper and pen tests (sometimes multiple-choice tests), can be unfamiliar to students and inconsistent with regular classroom activities (for example, students may be asked to generate a piece of writing without the usual extended drafting and conferencing stages and normal classroom support structures). Concerns are sometimes expressed about the validity of data gathered only in this way: is the resulting evidence an adequate reflection of students’ literacy abilities?

In the National School English Literacy Survey, a decision was made not to use machine-scored tests, but to assemble a range of evidence including both point-in-time and classroom work. Some of the evidence was collected under standardised assessment conditions but over a six-week period (the ‘common tasks’) and other evidence was collected from students’ regular classroom work in writing and speaking (‘best work’ samples). The Survey assessment procedures are described in detail on pages 263–268.

Teacher Involvement and Judgement

A criticism sometimes made of sample surveys is that they do not draw on the professional expertise of teachers, and participating teachers gain little from their involvement in these surveys. Tasks and methods may appear to lack relevance to classroom practices, and teachers, because they do not receive feedback on individual students’ results, and learn little that they can use to assist students in their learning.

The National School English Literacy Survey was seen as an opportunity to involve teachers directly in the assessment of their students, and to recognise and support the professionalism of teachers. To the extent that teachers are in the best position to observe and evaluate student learning, their assessments should enhance the validity of the Survey data.

It was intended that participation in the Survey should be professionally rewarding for teachers. Tasks were designed to be relevant to classroom teaching, to model high-quality assessment materials, and to assist teachers to assess in areas (such as speaking and listening) where some teachers feel less confident about developing tasks and assessing performance.

The Survey also offered teachers opportunities to improve classroom practice by providing them with professional development and practical assistance in making judgements about students’ literacy achievements.

2.3 Reliable Achievement Data

Information about student learning is collected for many different purposes, and the kinds of information collected for one purpose are not always appropriate for another.

Classroom teachers require information on individual learners. If this information is to be useful for classroom decision making, then it must be detailed and diagnostic. It is not particularly important that assessments made for diagnostic and teaching purposes are made in the same way by different teachers. Nor is it important in a teaching context that teachers in different classrooms are consistent in the way they observe and judge the work of their students.
In contrast, when information is collected for the purposes of monitoring levels of achievement nationally, the performances of individuals are of little interest, and comparability across classes and schools becomes crucial. And, because changes in average performance levels in student populations tend to be small and to occur slowly over time, sensitive assessment instruments are required to detect and monitor these changes. The levels of reliability required for system-level monitoring are thus much greater than those required for classroom diagnostic and teaching purposes.

**Comparability across classes**

To provide reliable measures of literacy achievement, teachers participating in the Survey administered the same tasks to all students, collected the same categories of classroom work, and used the same criteria for assessment. All participating teachers received two days of intensive professional development in applying the Survey methodology. Trained external assessors worked with teachers to ensure a common understanding of tasks and criteria for assessment. Teachers were provided with annotated samples of student work where appropriate. To maximise comparability across teachers and schools, the Survey assessments were made collaboratively by teachers and external assessors. The team of external assessors who worked with teachers to make assessments of student work included other teachers, literacy consultants and curriculum officers with knowledge and expertise in literacy education.

To further ensure comparability across classes, a central sampling of student work was undertaken. This allowed the remarking of student work if some teachers were not applying the assessment criteria and standards in the same way as other teachers.

Procedures used to maximise the reliability of the Survey data are described on pages 269–275 and 279–281.

**2.4 Contexts for Literacy Learning**

There is a wide body of research on factors influencing students’ literacy development. An exploration of these factors can elucidate our understanding of how students learn, and may result in an increase in the effectiveness of schools, teachers and the broader community in providing opportunities for students to develop their literacy skills.

To explore relationships between literacy achievements and the personal and educational backgrounds of students, Survey questionnaires for students, teachers and school principals were developed in consultation with a subgroup of the Management Committee and a number of invited experts. (See page 242 for a complete list of the members of the Questionnaire Reference Group.)

Analyses of responses to the questionnaires made it possible to examine relationships between levels of literacy achievement and the investigated background factors. (Believing that the effectiveness of literacy practices would be better studied through a longitudinal survey, the Survey Steering Committee decided that limited data should be collected on classroom teaching practices in literacy.) Responses to the questionnaires also provided descriptive information on the sample of schools, teachers and students participating in the Survey.
### 2.5 Special Indigenous Sample

A fifth principle was that the National School English Literacy Survey should include the collection of data on the literacy achievements of a Special Indigenous Sample of about 500 students at each of Years 3 and 5. The Special Indigenous Sample (SIS) was not a nationally representative sample of all Indigenous students in Years 3 and 5, but a sample of students in schools reporting at least five Indigenous students at each of these Year levels. The reason for drawing the Special Indigenous Sample in this way, rather than drawing a representative sample of Indigenous students, was a commitment to the Survey methodology which involved teachers working with groups of students. The procedure used to draw the Special Indigenous Sample is described on pages 250–252.

### 2.6 Comprehensive Reporting

A sixth principle guiding the National School English Literacy Survey was that the results of the Survey should be investigated and reported from a variety of different perspectives to provide the most informative picture possible of literacy achievements in Australian schools.

In an attempt to provide a comprehensive picture of students’ literacy achievements, a sequence of analyses was undertaken. Each of these analyses was designed to provide a different perspective on the Survey results and to answer a different set of questions about the Survey data. Analyses were undertaken to:

- construct a set of English literacy achievement scales;
- describe and illustrate levels of achievement on each scale;
- compare and report subgroup performances on each scale;
- interpret literacy achievements in terms of the levels of the English profile;
- interpret literacy achievements in terms of specified ‘benchmarks’; and
- investigate teacher/school and student characteristics correlated with literacy achievement.

**Empirically-based achievement scales**

A first objective of the analyses was to obtain a measure of each participating student’s achievement in writing, spelling, reading, viewing, speaking, and listening. These achievement measures were constructed to allow means and standard deviations to be calculated and compared for different subgroups of students; to provide baseline data for comparison with performances in possible future literacy surveys; and to enable statistical analyses to be undertaken of relationships between background variables and levels of literacy achievement.

Achievement scales were constructed for writing, spelling, reading, viewing, speaking, and listening, and students’ Survey responses were used to estimate (ie, measure) their level of achievement on each scale. In writing and speaking, two measures were obtained for each student: one based on performances on the common tasks, the other based on collected classroom ‘best work’.

The six achievement scales were marked out using numbers largely in the range 0 to 600 (established by setting the Year 3 mean at 300 and standard deviation at 100 for each aspect of literacy). A principle guiding the construction of these scales was that equal numerical differences should represent equal differences in achievement. To satisfy this intention, the Survey reporting scales were constructed using item response modelling (see pages 287–296).
A further intention was that it should be possible to report and compare directly the achievements of Year 3 and Year 5 students in each aspect of literacy, thereby allowing typical ‘growth’ over these two years of schooling to be estimated and reported. To express Year 3 and Year 5 achievements on the same scale, a separate ‘equating’ study was undertaken (see page 287).

The measures of writing, spelling, reading, viewing, speaking, and listening achievement constructed in these initial analyses, and the measurement scales on which they are expressed, provided the foundation for all subsequent analyses and reports.

**Described and Illustrated Levels of Achievement**

Wherever possible in the reporting of the Survey results, an attempt has been made to interpret students’ literacy measures in terms of the knowledge, skills and understandings typically associated with those measures. Literacy skills have been described and illustrated with examples of tasks requiring these skills and with samples of students’ spoken and written responses.

The achievement scales constructed for the National School English Literacy Survey are empirically based. In other words, the locations of literacy skills along each scale are based on students’ observed performances on assigned literacy tasks. The method used to construct the Survey scales allows achievement measures to be interpreted in terms of the skills typical of students at various levels of writing, spelling, reading, viewing, speaking, and listening achievement.

Each of the six literacy scales represents a continuum of achievement. However, for the purposes of describing and illustrating levels of achievement, each scale has been divided into five Levels (see pages 287–296).

**Reports on Subgroup Performances**

A variety of statistical summaries and graphical displays has been used to investigate and report the performances of major subgroups of the Survey population: Year 3 students, Year 5 students, males, females, students who have a language background other than English at home, various socioeconomic groups, and the Special Indigenous Sample.

In some pictorial displays, the entire distributions of student achievement measures are shown (pages 317 and 325). Where multiple distributions are displayed on the same page, summaries of student distributions in the form of ‘box and whisker’ plots have been used (eg pages 86–88).

The performances of subgroups of the student population have been captured in a range of usual statistics: the estimated population mean, standard deviation, median, and various other key percentile points. Where appropriate, these statistics are accompanied by estimates of sampling error.

**Achievements Interpreted in Terms of the English Profile**

As well as reporting and interpreting students’ literacy measures numerically, pictorially, and descriptively, analyses have been undertaken to map and interpret literacy achievements in terms of the levels of the English profile for Australian schools.

This stage of the analysis used the fact that the Survey assessment tasks had been constructed to address outcomes of the English profile. The outcome addressed by each Survey task was identified and, using the fact that the profile outcomes are organised into profile Levels, the approximate location of each profile Level on each literacy scale was
established. These approximate Level locations are indicated by the background shading in the pictorial displays in this report.

Having established the approximate location of each profile Level on each literacy scale, an estimate was then made of the percentage of students in Years 3 and 5 working in each profile Level. For this purpose, students were considered to be ‘working in’ (or, equivalently, ‘working at’) a Level if they were estimated to have a probability of at least 0.5 of succeeding on the easiest tasks from that Level. The percentages of students ‘working in’ each Level were then tabulated.

ACHIEVEMENTS INTERPRETED IN TERMS OF DRAFT LITERACY BENCHMARKS

To provide yet another perspective on the Survey results, students’ literacy measures have been interpreted in terms of draft ‘benchmarks’ in writing and reading (see Appendix 3).

Benchmarks have been developed as descriptions of desired levels of literacy achievement. An analysis has been undertaken of the relationship between the draft literacy benchmarks developed as part of a national collaborative activity under the auspices of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and the achievement scales constructed for the Survey. Through this process it has been possible to estimate a region on each scale within which the draft benchmark is located.

With this benchmark range established on each scale, the percentage of students working above the benchmark range, within the benchmark range, and below the benchmark range has been estimated for writing (pages 314–321) and reading (pages 322–329).

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ACHIEVEMENT AND BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS

A final set of analyses addressed the question of the relationship between students’ levels of literacy achievement and various background factors including teacher and school characteristics and individual student characteristics.

A multilevel analysis of the Survey data was undertaken in which school and teacher characteristics were included as one level of analysis and student characteristics were included as a second level. The extent to which differences in students’ literacy levels were correlated with differences between teachers and schools, and the extent to which differences were correlated with differences between individuals within schools were investigated and reported (see pages 201–234).
This chapter describes the English literacy achievements of Australian Year 3 and Year 5 students as assessed in the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey.

Students’ performances are reported in five areas of literacy achievement: writing (including spelling), reading, viewing, speaking, and listening. This chapter describes performances in each of these areas in turn, with each section having the same basic structure:

• a brief summary of what was assessed;
• a brief summary of how the assessments were made;
• a description of the scale on which students’ achievements are measured;
• a set of examples illustrating levels of achievement on each scale;
• a comparison of subgroup performances; and
• estimates of the percentages of students at each Level of the English profile.

The literacy achievements reported in this chapter are based on responses to sets of common tasks developed for all five aspects of literacy, and on samples of classroom work in writing and speaking. Different sets of common tasks were developed for Year 3 and Year 5 students. Details of the common tasks and classroom ‘best work’ samples are provided on pages 263–268.

Performances on the common tasks and classroom work samples have been used to estimate each student’s level of attainment on each of five reporting scales: for writing (including spelling), reading, viewing, speaking, and listening. These scales have been constructed from an analysis of students’ Survey performances (ie they are empirically based). The sequencing of literacy indicators along each scale reflects students’ success rates: the most commonly demonstrated behaviours are located towards the bottom of each scale; the least commonly demonstrated, towards the top (see pages 287–296 for details of the scale construction).

Each of the reporting scales is described and illustrated using examples of assessment tasks and samples of student work. The distributions of student achievement measures on each scale are then reported, for the entire Year 3 and Year 5 samples, and for various subgroups of the student population.

For each area of literacy, an attempt has been made to show the correspondence between locations along each scale and the levels of the English curriculum profile. A difference between each scale and the levels of the profile is that the Survey literacy indicators and their estimated locations on each scale are based on a statistical analysis of students’ performances on a set of real literacy tasks. A second difference is that these indicators are less comprehensive than the outcomes of the English profile because they are based only on tasks used in the Survey. This mapping of profile levels on to each scale is used to estimate the percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students working in each profile Level.
The 1996 National School English Literacy Survey included an assessment of the writing achievements of Year 3 and Year 5 students.

### What Was Assessed?

In assessing levels of writing achievement, special attention was paid to:

- quality of thought, including students’ abilities to express ideas, to write imaginatively, to develop an argument clearly and logically, and to support a point of view;
- quality of language control, including the ability to control sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary;
- sense of purpose, including the ability to write for a range of purposes and audiences.

Within this broad framework, writing assessment tasks were developed with reference to the outcomes of the English profile. Assessment procedures were designed to address a range of relevant profile outcomes in writing (see pages 255–262).

### How Was Writing Assessed?

Students’ levels of writing achievement were assessed from a portfolio of written work. Each student’s portfolio contained pieces of writing completed under controlled conditions (‘common tasks’) and pieces completed as part of regular classroom work (‘best work’). Teachers read and made judgements about the quality of their students’ writing using provided assessment guides.

#### Common tasks

The common writing tasks completed by students included:

- narrative/imaginative writing; and
- argumentative writing.

These tasks required students to:

- tell a story to entertain; and
- present an argument to convince a reader.

Year 3 students wrote an adventure story based on a legendary creature, and a letter to a magazine giving their opinion about whether or not birds should be kept in cages. Year 5 students wrote a narrative based on a series of pictures, and a piece giving their opinion about ‘kids and money’, based on a series of comments written by adults.

All Year 3 and Year 5 students completed two common writing tasks.

#### Best work

Student best work was selected by teachers in four specified categories:

- reflective/discursive (eg personal narrative, autobiography, argumentative response to a relevant issue);
- imaginative (eg a narrative, poem, or play);
- learning area other than English (eg a report or procedural piece); and
- response to read or viewed text (eg a film review or reflective comments on a book).
Year 3 and Year 5 teachers assembled these four pieces of student writing in final form. They also collected students’ drafts for one piece of classroom writing.

**The Writing Scale**

Students’ performances on the common writing tasks and samples of classroom work were used to construct a writing scale: a description of increasing achievement in writing. Some of the indicators on the writing scale address the *content* of student writing (i.e., the quality of thought and the sense of purpose evident in students’ writing). Other indicators describe students’ control of *language* (spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure). The procedures used to construct the writing scale are described on page 288.

**Content**

One set of indicators on the writing scale describes the content of student writing. These content indicators are shown in Figure 3.1. Students who produce writing with the lowest levels of content typically:
- list unrelated ideas and events;
- produce writing which consists of one or two sentences with little development or shape;
- produce writing by dictating words to a scribe; and
- produce a drawing accompanied by a few words or word-like symbols.

Students who produce writing with the highest levels of content typically:
- develop a sustained and integrated narrative;
- develop a coherent argument justifying a point of view;
- use detailed evidence to support a point of view;
- develop characterisation convincingly; and
- shape their writing to effectively engage an audience.

On the right of Figure 3.1 an attempt has been made to show the approximate relationship between these clusters of content indicators and the Writing levels of the English profile.

At about Level 1, students are aware of the nature and purposes of writing.

At about Level 2, students produce brief written texts incorporating a few ideas and opinions.

At about Level 3, students are beginning to shape their writing, to incorporate a few inter-related thoughts, and to comment on issues.

At about Level 4, students express a clear point of view, developing a few related arguments with a degree of critical distance, and developing a story-line with characterisation. They consider the impact of their writing on audience, perhaps imitating relevant genre.

At about Level 5, students show a developed sense of audience, shaping their writing effectively to engage the reader. They develop sustained and integrated narratives, and coherent arguments with detailed evidence to support a point of view.
FIGURE 3.1 CONTENT INDICATORS ON THE SURVEY WRITING SCALE

Level 5
Develops a sustained and integrated narrative (e.g., time order, consistent point of view, appropriate structure).
Develops a coherent argument justifying point of view.
Uses detailed evidence to support point of view.
Develops characterisation convincingly (e.g., discusses motives, feelings).
Shows a developed sense of audience.
Shapes writing to effectively engage reader.
Displays some degree of critical distance.
Develops a few related arguments.
Expresses clear point of view.
Imitates or parodies genre (e.g., mystery narrative).
Incorporates some detailed reflection on personal experience.
Incorporates ideas, details, and events most of which contribute to the storyline.
Incorporates prompts plausibly (e.g., visual narrative prompt).
Develops characterisation (explicitly, or implicitly).
Considers impact on audience (e.g., explores aspects of surprise, humour, suspense).

Level 4
Comments on issues briefly and superficially.
Expresses opinions based on personal experience.
Uses narrow range of ideas (incorporates a few inter-related thoughts).
Shapes writing with degree of coherence (e.g., logical sequence of events), but little sense of conscious control of content.
Defines characters minimally (e.g., given names).
Identifies key events, main characters, and settings in a narrative.
Shapes distinguishable story-line in a narrative.

Level 3
Relies on assertion rather than argument.
Relies heavily on the prompts (e.g., copies phrases).
Incorporates two or more ideas with little development.
Suggests plot but lacks coherence (e.g., incomplete, gaps in the story logic).
Contains irrelevant details.
Shows little shape (e.g., brief or long and disjointed, repetitive, strays from task).
Shows a basic understanding of task.

Level 2
Lists unrelated ideas and events.
Consists of one or two sentences or less with little development or shape.
Consists of words dictated to scribe.
Consists of a drawing with a few words or word-like symbols.

Level 1

Writing Achievement (content)
The second set of indicators on the writing scale describes increasing language control in students’ writing, including the ability to control sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary. These language indicators are shown in Figure 3.2.

Students with the lowest levels of language control typically:

- use some basic conventions (e.g., write from left to right, put spaces between words);
- produce some recognisable words, or words represented by their initial letters;
- use some correct initial letters and other sounds; and
- are able to read back their own writing.

Students with the highest levels of language control typically:

- revise their writing to be consistent in content and style;
- experiment with rearranging sentences;
- control grammatical structures and punctuation in complex sentences;
- organise their writing into a coherent whole appropriate to context;
- use precise and effective vocabulary; and
- approximate the spelling of particularly difficult words using patterns and conventions.

On the right of Figure 3.2 an attempt has been made to show the approximate relationship between these clusters of language indicators and the Writing levels of the English profile.

At about Level 1, students show an emerging awareness of the conventions of written language.

At about Level 2, students write in a way that can generally be interpreted by others, using some basic language conventions.

At about Level 3, students recognise and use many of the linguistic structures and features of a small range of text types. They show some evidence of planning, revising and proof-reading their own writing.

At about Level 4, students have control of basic language conventions. They use appropriate spelling and punctuation most of the time, shape their writing with a clear beginning and end, and adopt organisational conventions of structured format where appropriate.

At about Level 5, students organise their writing into a coherent whole appropriate to the context. They write with control of grammatical structures and punctuation in complex sentences, using precise and effective vocabulary.
FIGURE 3.2 LANGUAGE INDICATORS ON THE SURVEY WRITING SCALE

Level 5
Revises writing to be consistent in content and style.
Experiments with rearranging sentences.
Controls grammatical structures and punctuation in complex sentences.
Organises writing into coherent whole appropriate to context
(eg paragraphs for a narrative, headings and sub-headings for
informational text).
Uses precise and effective vocabulary.
Approximates spelling of particularly difficult words using patterns
and conventions.

Level 4
Begins to adopt organisational conventions of structured format
(eg general introductory statement to a report).
Contains a variety of sentence forms (eg simple and complex
sentences).
Uses appropriate punctuation most of the time.
Shapes writing with clear beginning and end and possibly paragraph
divisions.
Uses appropriate vocabulary most of the time.
Spells most words correctly.

Level 3
Shows some evidence of planning, revising and proof reading
own writing.
Controls simple sentence structure and attempts more complex
structures.
Attempts to vary sentence beginnings.
Attempts to shape piece structurally (eg notion of beginning and end).
Spells many common words correctly.
Writes legibly.

Level 2
Uses simple sentences.
Uses repetitive sentence structure.
Uses simple conjunctions (eg ‘and’ and ‘but’).
Controls common punctuation some or all of the time
(eg capital letters, full stops).
Spells high frequency words correctly most of the time.
Writes in a way that can be generally interpreted by others.

Level 1
Uses some basic conventions (eg writes from left to right, puts spaces
between words).
Contains some known words, or words represented by their
initial letters.
Uses some correct initial letters and other sounds.
Can be read back by the child at the time of writing.
To illustrate the five levels on the Survey writing scale, a number of student writing samples have been selected and are reproduced below. Because students’ scripts were assessed separately for content and language, some scripts were assessed at different levels on these two features of writing (eg, Level 3 for content, but Level 2 for language). For purposes of illustration, the writing samples shown below are drawn from scripts which were assessed at the same Level on content and language.

LEVEL 1 WRITING

The lowest rating assigned to student writing was Level 1.

An example of Level 1 writing is shown below. This piece displays some language conventions (writing from left to right, leaving spaces between words) and contains some known words. The writing has little shape and consists of a few unrelated ideas.

Content: Level 1
Language: Level 1
Example: common task (argumentative)

Dear Sticky,

_The bird can not_ to _get in the bird and live_.

_Bird and fly_ _through sky_

_and bird want to _fly to _

Year 3 teachers judged approximately 6% of students’ common task writing and 2% of their best work writing to be at Level 1 (see pages 275–276).
Three samples of Level 2 writing are shown below and on the next page. These pieces incorporate a few ideas with little development, and show a basic understanding of the task. Simple conjunctions and some punctuation are used. The writing can be interpreted by others.

**Example 1: common task (argumentative)**

Dear Sticky,

I think little birds should be kept. My bird flies on to my hand and that's why I think birds should be kept in cages.

I think big birds shouldn't be kept in cages.

**Example 2: common task (argumentative)**

Kids should work for money so they can buy things. Mums and dads should give kids money so they can spend it.
Teachers judged approximately 40% of Year 3 students’ common task writing, and 32% of their best work writing to be at Level 2; and 19% of Year 5 students’ common task writing, and 13% of their best work writing to be at Level 2 (see pages 275-277).
LEVEL 3 WRITING

Three examples of Level 3 writing are shown below and on the next two pages. Each of these pieces is shaped with a degree of coherence. Issues are discussed briefly and superficially. Simple sentence structure is controlled and more complex structures are attempted. Many common words are spelled correctly and the writing is legible. The second example also shows evidence of proof reading.

Content: Level 3
Language: Level 3

Example 1: common task (argumentative)

Dear Sticky,

I think birds should be in their own habitat and also be kept in a cage because it depends if they can protect themselves. I think they should be in their own habitat because they are part of nature, they can feed themselves, it’s cruel to keep them in a cage and if they fly away it means the want to stay there. I also think the little birds like the budgie should be kept in a cage because cats can eat them.
Example 2: common task (argumentative)

I think that kids should earn some money. Like they could dig up the garden, they could get the (cloth) clothes off the line and many other things. Your family might have a roster for doing the washing up or doing the gate. The kids might earn 10¢ for one job.

You might have deductions for not making their beds or having a messy room.

You may have some shopping to do and you could say, "You can have five dollars to spend and no more." Most likely they will go and spend it all in one go. They will most likely go and spend it on junk.
Teachers judged 42% of Year 3 students’ common task writing, and 49% of their best work writing to be at Level 3; and 46% of Year 5 students’ common task writing, and 45% of their best work writing to be at Level 3 (see pages 275–277).
LEVEL 4 WRITING

Three examples of Level 4 writing are shown below and on the next four pages. In these examples, a few related arguments are developed. The writing pieces express a clear point of view, and display some degree of critical distance. The pieces are shaped with a clear beginning and end, and contain a variety of sentence forms. Appropriate punctuation is used most of the time, and most words are spelled correctly.

Content:  Level 4
Language: Level 4

Example 1: common task (argumentative)

Birds Should be kept in cages because...
Out In the wild some birds get killed and in Australia it’s worse because cats, dogs and foxes have been brought from places like America and Europe and places like that and they hunt our Australian native wild life (includes birds, reptiles, amphibians and other Australian wild life).

Birds shouldn’t be kept
in cages because……. They should be able to stay in their own natural environment and if kept in a cage for too long it could become very sad and heartbroken that it just sat there and waited and waited and died. You should keep small domesticated birds and try to get an average-sized bird. Birds should stay in the wild but if kept it should be kept in a zoo. You might see one at the vet to see if you should try to choose the right bird for a pet.
Example 2: common task (argumentative)

Kids need money to cope with every day life.

It is true that most kids expect to be paid for places when they go to places because their parents earn more money than kids. For example, my dad earns probably more than a thousand a month and I only get $10 a week for pocket money out if I want the money I have to wash, make my bed, eat, so I earn my pocket money and so does my friend Tania. And if we went to the Museum it’s about $5 to get in and if I had to pay for that myself there is half a week’s pay gone.

Kids need money so they know what it’s like living by their streets and saving and spending the right amount so we need to talk about the money we have so adults can help us kids buy the right things not so we spend our money on something silly.
Example 3: best work (reflective/discursive)

During the weekend I went to my daddys to sleep the night. I was getting rather bored by my self so I asked him if I could invite a friend to sleep the night. At about ,mrmr 5.30 I phoned Sarah to see if she wanted to come over, the answer was yes, all right. She came over at 6.30, her parents were going out so it was convenient. We did not know what to do. Sarah, the brainy one said we could make Mrs Hepworth a best teacher award, seen as well Mrs Barton had one and Mrs Hepworth deffiantly deserved one. At round about 7.00 we ate a delicious dinner which was a roast with squash, peas, potatoes and gravy, yummy, which lasted till 8.00.

This was the BEST bit of all. We had to make our beds again seen as well neither of us liked blankets covering our body at night. I asked Jan (my step-mum) if we could have the donnas that were in my cupboard on our beds, she said yes. Now I was the one how new how to get donnas insides in the cover, but I must of got it a bit wrong because Sarah ended up stuck in the donna. I will tell you what had happened. I tried my way that was to get the corners of the inside to the
Teachers judged 12% of Year 3 students’ common task writing, and 17% of their best work writing to be at Level 4; and 29% of Year 5 students’ common task writing, and 33% of their best work writing to be at Level 4 (see pages 275–277).

**Level 5 Writing**

An example of Level 5 writing is shown opposite. This example shows a developed sense of audience. It is shaped to effectively engage the reader, and the point of view expressed is justified with detailed evidence. The piece is organised with appropriate paragraph divisions, grammatical structures and punctuation in complex sentences are controlled, and precise and effective vocabulary is used.
“All kids think about how is money” says one mum. “I agree, when we were young we were happy playing,” says the other mum.

I don’t agree. It’s true that SOME kids expect to be paid for everything they do, but I wonder who they got that from? Their parents. Adults expect to be paid for everything THEY do anyway; it’s only SOME kids who think that way. If you look back on what those mums said they say that they were happy just playing. So are we! If we have to be drawn away from our friends to do a job we certainly want to get some money for it!

Parents think that we want everything we see on television. So some adults don’t want us to watch television. Most of
Teachers judged 6% of Year 5 students’ common task writing, and 9% of their best work writing to be at Level 5 (see pages 275–277).
Measuring Writing Achievement

Each student’s performances on the common writing tasks and classroom work samples were used to construct a measure of that student’s writing achievement. Measures of student writing were constructed in three steps. First, each student’s ratings (both content and language) on the two common writing tasks were combined to provide a measure of the student’s writing achievement under controlled (test) conditions. Second, the student’s ratings (both content and language) on the four pieces of classroom writing were combined to provide a measure of the student’s writing achievement under conditions of typical classroom support. Third, ratings on all six pieces of writing were combined to produce a ‘combined’ writing measure for the student.

Figure 3.3 summarises the distributions of Year 3 and Year 5 students’ writing measures based on their common writing task performances and on their classroom ‘best work’ in writing. The distributions of writing measures are shown here as ‘box and whisker’ plots which indicate the levels on the writing scale achieved by 10%, 20%, 50%, 80% and 90% of students in each Year group. The number inside each box is the median of the distribution.

From Figure 3.3 it can be seen that estimates of writing achievement based on best work samples are higher than estimates based on common task writing. It is not surprising that teachers judged students’ best work writing to be better than writing completed under test conditions. In classroom settings, students usually have opportunities to draft and revise their writing, to conference with teachers and peers, and to develop a piece of writing over days or weeks. Many teachers annotated students’ classroom work, commenting on this development process (see below). In contrast, measures based on common task writing reflect performances under more controlled, timed writing conditions.

Teacher’s Comment on the Drafting Process

![Content and Language Chart]

An interesting feature of Figure 3.3 is that lower achievers in writing at both Year 3 and Year 5 appear to benefit most from opportunities to draft, revise and conference their writing.

Figure 3.4 shows the distributions of students’ writing achievement measures based on their two common writing tasks and four classroom work samples combined. In constructing these combined measures, the common task and classroom work samples were weighted equally.
For the purposes of establishing baseline measures of Year 3 and Year 5 writing achievement against which performances in future English literacy surveys might be compared, the estimated Year 3 and Year 5 population means and standard deviations have been calculated and are reported in Table 3.1. The sampling standard errors of the means are shown. The estimated population means and standard deviations shown here are based on common task writing only and reflect the decision to report writing measures on a scale defined by setting the Year 3 mean at 300 and standard deviation at 100. The numbers of students on which these estimates are based are shown in the left column.

### Table 3.1 Writing means and standard deviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>300 (± 2)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=3678</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>380 (± 2)</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=3652</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 3.1 it can be seen that the difference between the average writing achievement at Year 5 and the average writing achievement at Year 3 is 80 points on the Survey writing scale or .8 of the standard deviation at Year 3. From Figure 3.3 it can be seen that this growth from Year 3 to Year 5 is less than a full profile level.
Figure 3.3 Distributions of students' estimated writing achievements.
FIGURE 3.4 DISTRIBUTIONS OF COMBINED WRITING ACHIEVEMENT ESTIMATES
**Subgroup Performances**

Figures 3.5 to 3.7 show the distributions of student writing measures for three subgroups of the population: male/female; English/language other than English background; and low, medium and high socio-economic background.

From Figure 3.5 it can be seen that Year 3 females are, on average, achieving at a higher level in writing than Year 3 males. The median estimate for Year 3 females is 308 on the writing achievement scale and the median estimate for Year 3 males, 260. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median estimated achievement levels are 382 and 345 respectively.

There is no significant change in the relative writing achievements of males and females between Year 3 and Year 5: females achieve about 40 points (0.4 of a standard deviation for all students) higher than males at both Year levels. The finding that girls have higher writing achievement levels than boys is consistent with the findings of many other studies of primary school writing.

From Figure 3.6 it can be seen that students from English-speaking backgrounds are, on average, achieving at a slightly higher level in writing than students from homes in which the main language spoken is a language other than English.

The median for Year 3 English background students is 287, and for students from backgrounds other than English, 272. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median writing achievement of English background students is 363, and of languages other than English students, 348.

Figure 3.7 shows that students of high socio-economic status (SES) are, on average, at each Year level, achieving at a higher level in writing than students of medium SES who, in turn, are achieving at a higher level in writing than students of low SES. Students in the high SES group are children of parents in upper professional and managerial occupations; students in the medium SES group, children of parents in clerical and skilled manual occupations; and students in the low SES group, children of parents in unskilled manual occupations.

The median writing achievement of Year 3 students from high socio-economic backgrounds is 330, from medium SES backgrounds, 286; and from low SES backgrounds, 246. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median writing achievement estimates are 409, 353, and 339 for students from high, medium, and low SES backgrounds.

At Year 5, the difference between the median writing achievements for students of low and medium SES is less than at Year 3, but the difference between the median achievements for students of medium and high SES is greater than at Year 3. Students of medium SES appear to make less progress than students of low and high SES.

An interesting feature of Figure 3.7 is the achievement of Year 3 students of high SES compared with Year 5 students’ achievements. These Year 3 students are, on average, achieving only slightly below the average achievement of Year 5 students of low SES. The most able students from this group (90th percentile) are achieving at a higher level than most Year 5 students of medium SES and above the median achievement of Year 5 students from high socio-economic backgrounds.
Figure 3.5 Distributions of male and female students’ estimated writing achievements.
FIGURE 3.6 DISTRIBUTIONS OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND AND OTHER THAN ENGLISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND STUDENTS’ ESTIMATED WRITING ACHIEVEMENTS
Figure 3.7 Distributions of Low, Medium and High Socio-economic Status Students’ Estimated Writing Achievements
Students in the Special Indigenous Sample also completed the Survey writing tasks. The performances of these students were used to estimate their levels of achievement on the writing scale. As for students in the main sample, an on-balance estimate of each student’s level of achievement on the writing scale was made from performances on the two common writing tasks, and a second estimate was made from performances on the four best work writing samples.

In interpreting the writing performances of the Special Indigenous Sample, it must be remembered that this was not a representative sample of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 3 and 5, but a sample of students in schools reporting five or more Indigenous students at both Year 3 and Year 5.

Figure 3.8 shows the distributions of the two sets of writing measures (common task and best work) for both Year 3 and Year 5 students in the Special Indigenous Sample. From Figure 3.8 it can be seen that writing measures based on best work samples are higher than measures based on common task writing. Lower achievers at both Year 3 and Year 5 appear to benefit most from opportunities to draft, revise and conference their writing.

It is possible that the common task writing prompts, despite their careful selection, were particularly difficult for students in the Special Indigenous Sample.

The mean and standard deviation of the Year 3 and Year 5 writing measures for the Special Indigenous Sample are shown in Table 3.2. These measures are based on the common task writing only. Notice that the large sampling error on the mean is the result of the relatively small number of students (far left column) in this sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=312</td>
<td>175 (± 7)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>273 (± 7)</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3.8 Distributions of estimated writing achievements for the Special Indigenous Sample
Because the common writing tasks and classroom best work samples in writing were designed to provide information about the outcomes of the English profile for Australian schools, and because the content and language indicators on the Survey scale are based directly on these outcomes, it has been possible to ‘map’ the levels of the English profile on to the Survey writing scale. Level 1 on the Survey scale corresponds to profile Level 1; Level 2, to profile Level 2; and so on.

This direct mapping of profile levels on to the writing scale has made it possible to estimate the percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students working in each profile level, based on students’ common task writing and also on their classroom best work samples. These percentages are shown in Tables 3.3 and 3.4.

To make these estimates, it was necessary to decide what it meant for a student to be ‘working in’ a profile level. The rule applied here was a 50% rule. For example, a student whose common task writing assessments were 2, 2, 3, 3 was considered to be ‘working in’ Level 3 because at least 50% of that student’s assessments were at Level 3. (A student with the assessments 1, 2, 3, 4 also would have been considered, on balance, to be working in Level 3 because they achieved the same writing score, 10, as a student with assessments 2, 2, 3, 3.)

Table 3.3 Percentage of Year 3 students working in each profile level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile Level</th>
<th>Common Tasks</th>
<th>Best Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 Percentage of Year 5 students working in each profile level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile Level</th>
<th>Common Tasks</th>
<th>Best Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students in the Special Indigenous Sample working at each profile level in writing are shown in Tables 3.5 and 3.6.

**Table 3.5 Percentage of Year 3 Special Indigenous Sample students working in each profile level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Common Tasks</th>
<th>Best Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.6 Percentage of Year 5 Special Indigenous Sample students working in each profile level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Common Tasks</th>
<th>Best Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 or below</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spelling

Attention was paid to spelling when assessing student writing. Together with other features of student writing such as punctuation, sentence structure, and vocabulary, the assessment of spelling formed part of the assessment of students’ control of language conventions (see pages 260 and 261).

During the course of the Survey, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs agreed at its March 1997 meeting to set as a goal that every child leaving primary school should be numerate and able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level. With this explicit identification of spelling as an area of priority, a decision was made to provide a more detailed analysis of students’ levels of spelling achievement.

How was spelling assessed?

Students’ levels of spelling achievement were estimated from two sources: ‘common task’ writing and ‘best work’ writing scripts. Each student completed two pieces of common task writing and four pieces of classroom (‘best work’) writing. For one piece of ‘best work’, teachers submitted a draft as well as the final copy. For the assessment of Spelling, the two common task writing scripts, and the best work script which was accompanied by draft were reviewed.

Trained markers read and made judgements of the quality of students’ spelling using provided assessment guides. For each student, markers made one overall spelling assessment based on the student’s two common task scripts. For a sample of students, markers also made an overall assessment based on the single best work script (page 105).

What was assessed?

In assessing levels of spelling achievement, special attention was paid to:

- the kinds of words that students were able to spell correctly; for example, whether the words spelled correctly were high frequency words such as ‘did’, ‘are’, ‘soon’, ‘they’, and ‘that’, or words with irregular or unusual spellings such as ‘glimpse’ and ‘trudged’; and
- the features of students’ incorrect spellings; for example, whether all letters were present and there was a confusion of letter order (‘brids’), or all sounds were represented without all letters present (‘finaly’).

The spelling scale

Students’ spelling performances were used to construct a scale of increasing achievement in spelling. The spelling scale is empirically based: in other words, it is based on an analysis of observed student spellings. The spelling indicators (descriptions of observed spellings) are shown in Figure 3.9.
The cluster of indicators lowest on the scale, including
word-like clusters of letters
some simple high frequency words eg I, go, to
some initial letters eg benks (because)
describes the lowest level of achievement in spelling.
The cluster of indicators highest on the scale, including
a range of irregular and unusual spellings eg glimpse, trudged
correct use of word endings such as -ion, -tion, -ious
correctly used homophones
describes the highest level of spelling achievement in the Survey.

On the right of Figure 3.9, an attempt has been made to show the approximate
relationship between these clusters of indicators and the descriptions of spelling
achievement as described in the writing levels of the English profile.

At about Level 1, students show an emerging awareness of spelling. They produce word-
like clusters of letters which are difficult to read and understand. Some simple high
frequency words such as ‘I’ and ‘go’ are spelled correctly, and spelling attempts exhibit
some initial letters and letter patterns.

At about Level 2, students spell some words correctly but make a large number of errors.
High frequency words such as ‘did’, ‘are’ and ‘will’ usually are spelled correctly. Spelling
attempts are close with many sounds represented. There is evidence of difficulty with
some sounds and word endings, and some words are still unrecognisable.

At about Level 3, students spell many words correctly and their spellings are readable.
Common words such as ‘when’, ‘they’ and ‘that’ are spelled correctly consistently, and
there is correct use of some word endings such as ‘ed’ and ‘ing’. Spelling attempts use
recognisable patterns and some difficult words such as ‘probably’ are attempted (eg
prouibly).

At about Level 4, most spelling is correct. Correct spellings exhibit a number of words of
two or more syllables, some words containing silent letters, and the use of spelling rules
such as -ed endings. Spelling attempts exhibit phonetic or visual patterns, and all sounds
are represented, for example, diffrant (different).

At about Level 5, spelling is almost entirely correct. Correct spellings exhibit a range of
irregular and unusual spellings. Word endings such as -ion, -tion, -ful and -ious are
evident and contractions are spelled correctly.
Figure 3.9 Spelling indicators on the Survey writing scale

Writing Achievement (spelling)

- **Level 5**: Spelling is almost entirely correct. Correct spelling exhibits a range of: irregular/unusual spellings eg glimpse, trudged, thought.
- **Level 4**: Correct spelling exhibits: word endings such as -ion, -tion, -ful, -ious, contractions eg can’t, won’t.
- **Level 3**: Spelling rules eg double consonants, ‘i before e’. Correctly used homophones eg, there, they’re, their.
- **Level 2**: Spelling attempts are very close. Most spelling is correct. Correct spelling exhibits: a number of words with two or more syllables, some words containing silent letters (eg, knocked).
- **Level 1**: Use of spelling rules eg -ing, -ed endings, plurals.
- **Level 0**: Spelling attempts exhibit: phonetic, visual patterns, representation of all sounds eg diffrant (different), consistent errors.

- **Level 5**: Many words are spelled correctly. Quite readable. Correct spelling exhibits: many common words spelled consistently eg because, they, some correct use of -ed and -ing endings.
- **Level 4**: Spelling attempts exhibit: patterns that make words recognisable eg recomend (recommend), confusion of letter order eg brids (birds).
- **Level 3**: Difficulty with double letter patterns eg realy (really), some attempt at difficult words eg probably (probably).
- **Level 2**: Some correct spelling, a large number of errors. High frequency words eg did, are, soon, will.
- **Level 1**: Correct spelling exhibits: close attempts eg wet (went), bat (but), likl (like), missing sounds eg sod (should), incorrect sounds eg, thing (think), difficulty with word endings -ing and -ed eg stopt, some unrecognisable words eg ckwol (quickly), inconsistent spelling of words eg thir, ther (there).
- **Level 0**: Word-like clusters of letters. Difficult to read and understand. Correct spelling exhibits: some simple high frequency words eg I, go, to.
- **Level 0**: Spelling attempts: exhibit some initial letters eg benks (because), exhibit some known letter sounds eg fienuym (from), are not closely linked to phonetic/visual patterns eg sieenr (should).
THE SPELLING SCALE—EXAMPLES

To illustrate the five levels on the spelling scale, a number of student writing samples have been selected and are reproduced below. These samples are drawn from students’ common task writing. Most ‘best work’ writing had been corrected through a drafting process, so there were few spelling errors in best work scripts.

LEVEL 1 SPELLING

The lowest rating assigned to student spelling was Level 1.

An example of Level 1 spelling is shown below. This piece displays word-like clusters of letters and is difficult to read and understand. Some simple, high frequency words are spelled correctly, for example, ‘in’, ‘do’, ‘we’. Some initial letters are correct, and there is evidence of recognisable letter patterns. Most spelling attempts are not closely linked to phonetic/visual patterns: for example, ‘geniuy’.

```
No long silent Barks we diary geniuy
Keep in cages do we
how dizzy The Find
```

Approximately 1% of Year 3 students’ and 1% of Year 5 students’ common task spelling was judged to be at Level 1.
LEVEL 2 SPELLING

An example of Level 2 spelling is shown below. This piece displays some correct spelling, but there is a large number of errors. High frequency words such as not, you, to, him, and from are spelled correctly. Some spelling attempts are close eg diy (die), cept (kept). There is evidence of difficulty with some sounds eg mack (much).

![Sample writing]

Approximately 17% of Year 3 students’ and 3% of Year 5 students’ common task spelling was judged to be at Level 2.
LEVEL 3 SPELLING

An example of Level 3 spelling is shown below. In this piece many common words are spelled correctly and consistently (eg when, what, walking, school) and the writing is quite readable. There is some correct use of ‘ed’ and ‘ing’ endings. Spelling attempts exhibit patterns that make words recognisable and there is some attempt at difficult words eg sudnley (suddenly), wored (worried) and loveley (lovely).

```
ROC!

one day when I was walking
to school, I saw a really big
shadow on the school wall.
I went over to see what
it was, guess what it was
a ROC! it was so big, it picked
me up. We flew up and up and
up we where in the clouds.
"Hallo" said "what a talking
bird, there’s no such thing!" I
said. The ROC landed in a jungle.
What a jungle, sudnley a lion
came "Help !" I said but the
ROC didn’t listen. He eat it.
```
Approximately 42% of Year 3 students’ and 32% of Year 5 students’ common task spelling was judged to be at Level 3.
LEVEL 4 SPELLING

An example of Level 4 spelling is shown below. Most spelling in this piece is correct.

Many of the correctly spelled words contain more than one syllable and there are some words containing silent letters (knocked). The spelling attempts exhibit phonetic and visual patterns: accross (across), comming (coming), and all sounds are represented: finaly (finally), mayby (maybe).

There once was a boy named Thomas. He was the mail man of the town. His nickname was Mali and I know you will understand why? It was Wednesday morning a big parcel well box came in for someone, it looked pretty urgent so he thought he’d better take it right away. He liked his job and he got lots of exercise. He wasn’t like most people because he never (looked) wanted to leave work on Fridays so he got to work on Saturdays and only took Sundays off. Thomas picked the (good) box up and headed towards Short St that’s were it said to go. Somedays he was worried he’d get run over by a truck or a car because he was always
Approximately 32% of Year 3 students’ and 49% of Year 5 students’ common task spelling was judged to be at Level 4. Approximately 67% of Year 3 students’ and 48% of Year 5 students’ best work spelling was judged to be at this level.
LEVEL 5 SPELLING

The highest rating assigned to student spelling was Level 5.

An example of Level 5 spelling is shown below. The spelling in this piece is almost entirely correct, exhibiting a range of irregular or unusual spellings (shoulders, trudged, through), correct use of spelling rules (stopped, didn’t), and correctly used homophones (would, whole). Spelling attempts are very close: immediatly (immediately).

```
One day, Jason Stone was walking home with his dog, Sasha. "Hmm, I wonder if there is any mail," Jason said to himself. "Woof, woof," said Sasha. Jason crossed the road after the mail van had gone past. It stopped, and put a parcel at the door. The postman went up to the door and looked down. The big box was marked "Confidential, Keep Out, Private." Jason picked the box up, took it inside, and dropped the heavy parcel on the bench. He waited until his father got home to open it. When his father opened the box there was a note and a 'bomb.' The note was marked 'don't call bomb squad and defuse otherwise....
```
Approximately 8% of Year 3 students’ and 15% of Year 5 students’ common task spelling was judged to be at Level 5. Twenty-five per cent of Year 3 students’ and 44% of Year 5 students’ best work spelling was judged to be at this level.
All common task writing was reassessed against the Survey spelling scale described and illustrated on pages 93 to 103. A single global assessment was made of each student’s level of spelling achievement based on their first (narrative) piece of writing. This assessment was confirmed by then inspecting the student’s second (procedural) piece of writing. If the second piece of writing did not confirm the initial assessment, a single global assessment was made across the two pieces of common task writing.

The percentages of students achieving at each spelling level on their common task writing are shown in Table 3.7. The spelling level most commonly assigned to Year 3 writing was Level 3; the level most commonly assigned to Year 5 writing was Level 4.

Students’ best work writing also was assessed for spelling. The piece of classroom work assessed for spelling was the piece for which a first draft of the student work was available.

During the assessment of best work for spelling it became clear that there was considerable variation in the assistance students had received with the spelling of unfamiliar words. In some cases, different pieces of a student’s classroom writing displayed very different levels of spelling, presumably because the student had different levels of assistance in correcting spelling in different writing pieces. Most best work writing displayed the highest levels of spelling (Level 4 and Level 5) at both Year 3 and Year 5.

In reassessing best work for spelling, assessors frequently expressed the opinion that what they were seeing was not an accurate reflection of students’ spelling abilities, but the outcome of usual classroom processes of checking and correcting student writing for spelling. For this reason, the assessment of best work for spelling was terminated after the first several hundred student scripts. The percentages of best work assessed at each level of spelling achievement are shown in Table 3.8 for this limited sample of students.
Writing scripts produced by students in the Special Indigenous Sample also were assessed for spelling. The percentages of scripts assessed at each level of spelling are shown in Table 3.9.

| Table 3.8 Percentages of students at each level of spelling achievement (Best Work Writing) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Year 3 | Year 5 |
| Level 5 | 25 | 44 |
| Level 4 | 67 | 48 |
| Level 3 | 7 | 8 |
| Level 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Level 1 | 0 | 0 |

| Table 3.9 Percentages of Special Indigenous Students at each level of spelling achievement (Common Task Writing) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Year 3 | Year 5 |
| Level 5 | 1 | 3 |
| Level 4 | 11 | 45 |
| Level 3 | 31 | 34 |
| Level 2 | 42 | 17 |
| Level 1 | 15 | 1 |

It can be seen from Table 3.9 that most Year 3 students and 18% of Year 5 students in the Special Indigenous Sample are estimated to be at the lowest two levels of spelling achievement (Levels 1 and 2). These students typically produce writing with many spelling errors and only common, high frequency words spelled correctly.
The 1996 National School English Literacy Survey included an assessment of the reading achievements of Year 3 and Year 5 students.

**WHAT WAS ASSESSED?**

In assessing levels of reading achievement, special attention was paid to:

- students’ abilities to read and interpret a range of fiction and non-fiction texts with a degree of critical awareness;
- students’ abilities to understand the main themes, ideas and points of view in written texts;
- students’ appreciations of writer’s craft; and
- students’ awareness of the relationship between the medium and message in written texts.

Within this broad framework, reading assessment tasks were developed with reference to the outcomes of the English profile. Assessment procedures were designed to address a range of relevant profile outcomes in reading (see pages 257 and 259–260).

**HOW WAS READING ASSESSED? — THE COMMON TASKS**

Students’ levels of reading achievement were assessed by asking them to read and answer questions about several passages of text in a magazine. Classroom teachers then read and made judgements about the quality of their students’ responses using provided guides to the assessment of student work.

The passages read by students included:

- narrative and poetry texts (literary experience);
- reports and scientific texts (information retrieval); and
- procedural texts (how to perform a task).

Year 3 and Year 5 students attempted different reading tasks. Year 3 students completed a total of 27 reading tasks; Year 5 students completed 29. These tasks required students to:

- form initial understandings of text, including retrieving information
  - eg  What does the text say about the size of the radio telescopes at Parkes, Australia? Why did the man tell his son not to fly too close to the sun?
- understanding steps in a procedure (Year 3)
  - eg  Would the pop-up card still work if you did Step 7 before Step 6?
- reflect on themes, ideas, and points of view in text
  - eg  Does the writer think the mosquito is lovely? Explain your answer.
- develop individual interpretations of text
  - eg  Do you think this is a true story? Explain your answer. Why do you think an iguana has spines on its back?
Figure 3.10 Some indicators on the Survey reading scale

- Recognises the connection between presentation style and nature of information (e.g., question & answer format for interview data).
- Infers meaning from figurative language.
- Interprets idiomatic language (e.g., 'last but not least').
- Recognises how linguistic features (e.g., exclamation marks) support ideas implicit in a text.
- Selects several pieces of information from a complex presentation of text.
- Recognises probable context for a piece of writing.
- Explains an author's point of view.
- Recognises the tone of a simple poem.
- Orders detailed events from a narrative.
- Recognises conventional linguistic features (e.g., pronunciation guides).
- Interprets factual information.
- Recognises the relationship between two pieces of text.
- Generates research question to explore topic about which they have read.
- Works out meaning of unknown word from context and picture clues.
- Finds evidence to support a statement.
- Orders instructions in a procedure.
- Extracts information from complex presentation of text and pictures.
- Infers missing step in a procedure.
- Recognises main idea in paragraph of factual text.
- Decides whether writing is fact or fiction based on described events.
- Recognises text genre from book titles.
- Makes connections between pieces of factual info. in simple text.
- Predicts a plausible ending for an illustrated story.
- Recognises how elements of an illustration support text in a story.
- Uses title and illustration to predict story setting.
- Interprets picture to predict what happens next in illustrated story.
- Uses book title and illustration to identify key elements of story.
reflect on the construction of text, including language conventions

eg The article on radio telescopes says astronomers can ‘see’ what is happening in space. Why is the word ‘see’ in inverted commas?

elements of the writer’s craft

eg Why is the article written in this style? Why are some of the words written with capital letters and exclamation points?

**The Reading Scale**

Students’ performances on the Survey reading tasks were used to construct a scale of increasing achievement in reading. This scale is shown in Figure 3.10. The construction of this scale is described on pages 295–296.

The reading scale is empirically based: in other words, it is based on an analysis of observed student performances in the Survey. The reading indicators (descriptions of observed reading behaviours) in Figure 3.10 are derived from some, but not all, of the Survey tasks.

The indicator lowest on the scale, uses book title and illustration to identify key elements of a story describes performance on the easiest reading task in the Survey. This task, given only to Year 3 students, asks for a prediction of what a story might be about from the book title and cover illustration. This was the reading task most often completed correctly, thus placing it lower on the reading scale than all other reading indicators.

The indicator at the top of Figure 3.10, recognises the connection between presentation style and nature of information describes one of the most difficult reading tasks in the Survey. This task, given only to Year 5 students, assesses knowledge of linguistic structures and features by asking students to reflect on why a writer chose a particular text format to present information from an interview.

Each indicator in Figure 3.10 is located on the scale according to the level of difficulty students experienced in completing that task.

The approximate relationship between these indicators and the reading levels of the English profile is shown on the right of Figure 3.10.

At about Level 1, students are beginning to interpret familiar written symbols and to recognise and use cues to predict meaning from printed texts.

At about Level 2, students retell detail from short texts with familiar topics and vocabulary, recognise main ideas in short passages of text, and predict plausible endings for stories.

At about Level 3, students interpret and discuss relationships between ideas in text, including finding evidence to support a statement, ordering instructions in a procedure, and inferring missing steps in a procedure.
Figure 3.11 Common tasks calibrated on the Survey reading scale.
At about Level 4, students explain possible reasons for different interpretations of text and justify their own interpretations of information in texts containing unfamiliar concepts. Examples include explaining an author’s point of view, recognising the tone of a simple poem, and recognising the probable context of a piece of writing.

At about Level 5, students discuss themes and issues in texts with challenging structures and ideas, recognise the purposes and audiences for which texts are constructed, and draw on knowledge of linguistic structures and features to explain how texts are constructed. Examples include inferring meaning from figurative language and identifying the contributions to meaning of similes and metaphors.

The Reading Scale — Examples

Figure 3.11 shows all Survey tasks calibrated on the reading scale. The tasks most often answered correctly are at the bottom of the figure; the tasks least often answered correctly are at the top. Some tasks (eg Task 3 in Year 3) were in two parts and the difficulties of the two parts are shown separately (3.1 and 3.2).

It can be seen from this picture that the tasks given to Year 3 students were in general easier than the tasks given to Year 5 students. (The ‘equating’ procedure used to position Year 3 and Year 5 reading tasks on the same scale is described on page 287.) Most tasks at Year 3 address outcomes from Levels 2 and 3 of the English profile; most tasks at Year 5 address outcomes from Levels 3 and 4.

Within this full set of common tasks, eleven tasks have been highlighted (white on black). These six tasks from the Year 3 assessment and five tasks from the Year 5 assessment are used on the following pages to illustrate levels of achievement on the Survey reading scale.
An example of a Level 1 reading task is Task 3.1 from the Year 3 reading assessment. This task, shown below, asks students to use the information on the front cover of a picture book which they have not seen before to predict what the story might be about.

**Task 3.1**
answered correctly by 92% of Year 3 students

**Teacher says:** ‘Think about the story that might be in this book. Write two or three sentences to tell the story.’

This task was developed to address a Level 1 ‘strategies’ outcome: *Recognises and uses cues to predict meaning in visual and printed texts.* It was given only to Year 3 students and proved to be the easiest Reading task in the Survey (below 100 on the reading scale). An estimated 92% of Year 3 students were able to answer this question correctly.

**Level 2 Reading**

A number of reading tasks given to Year 3 students address outcomes from Level 2 of the English profile. These tasks tend to calibrate in the range 100 to 300 on the reading scale. Three examples of tasks which address Level 2 outcomes are shown opposite.

In Task 7, students read the first part of the story of Daedalus and Icarus, presented in cartoon format. The words accompanying the last picture in the cartoon are missing. Students are asked to write a sentence to go with the picture. This task was written to address the ‘strategies’ outcome: *Uses basic strategies for interpreting written and visual texts and maintains continuity in understanding when meaning is disrupted.*
In Task 14, students make connections between pieces of information in a simple factual text to explain the meaning of a word. This task addresses the ‘texts’ outcome: Constructs and retells meanings from short written texts with familiar topics and vocabulary, predictable text structures and frequent illustrations.

In Task 8, students judge whether a piece of writing is fact or fiction. This task addresses the ‘contextual understanding’ outcome: Understands that texts are constructed by people and represent real and imaginary experience.

Task 7
answered correctly by 81% of Year 3 students

‘Look at this picture. The words are missing from this part of the story. Write a sentence to go with this picture.’

Task 14
answered correctly by 68% of Year 3 students

‘Most iguanas are vegetarians. This means that they ___’
Extract from stimulus text:
‘Although they look fierce, most iguanas are vegetarians. They eat fruit, leaves and other parts of plants. Iguanas living on beaches even eat seaweed.’

Task 8
answered correctly by 62% of Year 3 students

‘Do you think this is a true story? Explain your answer.’

Other tasks in this region of the reading scale assess the ability to recognise text genre from book title, to recognise how elements of an illustration support text in a story, and to recognise the main idea in a paragraph of factual text. Level 2 tasks were given to both Year 3 and Year 5 students. More than 50% of Year 3 students and more than 70% of Year 5 students were able to answer questions of this kind.
LEVEL 3 READING

A large number of Survey tasks in reading addressed outcomes from Level 3 of the English profile. These tasks are generally in the 300 to 400 range of the reading scale.

Three examples of such tasks are shown below and opposite. These examples are taken from both the Year 3 and Year 5 reading assessments.

In Task 24 (Year 3) students are asked to order the tasks in a procedure about which they have just read. This task addresses the ‘texts’ outcome: *Interprets and discusses some relationships between ideas, information and events in written texts with familiar content and a small range of unfamiliar words and linguistic structures and features.*

Task 11 (Year 5) assesses the ability to recognise a conventional linguistic feature (a pronunciation guide). This task addresses the ‘linguistic structures and features’ outcome: *Identifies and uses the linguistic structures and features characteristic of a range of text types to construct meaning.*

In Task 15 (Year 3) students are asked to extract a piece of explicitly stated information from a complex presentation of text, photograph and diagram. This task addresses the ‘strategies’ outcome: *Integrates a variety of strategies for interpreting written and visual texts.*

---

**Task 24**

answered correctly by 48% of Year 3 students

‘Number these instructions in the right order. The first one has been done for you.

  Complete the picture.
  Cut the paper.
  1 Measure the lines.
  Join to another card.
  Bend the middle part.’

**Task 11**

answered correctly by 49% of Year 5 students

‘The name Dr Xargle is followed by Zar-gul in brackets. This is___’

- Dr Xargle’s nickname.
- the way to say Xargle.
- a different way to spell Xargle.
- the alien way to spell Xargle.’
Other tasks in this region of the reading scale assess the ability to infer missing steps in a procedure, to work out the meaning of unknown words from context and picture clues, to generate a research question to explore a topic about which students have just read, to recognise the relationship between two pieces of text (in this instance, interpreting the purpose of annotations), to find evidence to support a statement, and to interpret factual information.

Questions in this range were given to both Year 3 and Year 5 students. Between 30% and 50% of Year 3 students and between 50% and 70% of Year 5 students were able to answer questions of this kind.
LEVEL 4 READING

Survey tasks in reading addressing outcomes from Level 4 of the English profile tend to calibrate in the range 400 to 500 on the reading scale. Two examples are shown below and opposite.

Task 29 (Year 5) assesses the ability to recognise how linguistic features (in this instance, exclamation marks) support ideas implicit in text. This task was developed to address the ‘linguistic structures and features’ outcome: *With teacher guidance, identifies and discusses how linguistic structures and features work to shape readers’ and viewers’ understanding of texts.*

Task 10 (Year 5) asks students to explain a writer’s point of view by using content and tone to identify several pieces of the author’s work. This task was developed to address the ‘text’ outcome: *Justifies own interpretation of ideas, information and events in texts containing some unfamiliar concepts and topics and which introduce relatively complex linguistic structures and features.*

Task 29 answered correctly by 31% of Year 5 students

‘Why are there exclamation marks at the end of the ODD SPOT piece of writing?’

Extract from stimulus:

‘Convinced he was being signalled by an intelligent alien life form, he began an in-depth investigation – only to find he was picking up signals from the microwave in the canteen downstairs!!’

Other tasks in this region of the reading scale assess the ability to select several pieces of information from a complex presentation of text (scan for examples of requested information), recognise the tone of a simple poem, order detailed events from a narrative, and recognise a probable context for a piece of writing (letters in a club magazine).

Tasks in this range were given to both Year 3 and Year 5 students. Fewer than 30% of Year 3 students and from 25% to 50% of Year 5 students were able to complete tasks of this kind.
Here is a letter about next month’s topic DO WE NEED LAWS IN SPACE?

“Not long ago, some scientists crashed a satellite into Jupiter, just so it could collect information about the planet. I think that is totally irresponsible.”

9 Who do you think wrote it?
- Zoe
- Phoung
- Anna
- Pedro
- ‘Astro’

10 Explain your answer.
LEVEL 5 READING

Some Survey tasks in reading addressed outcomes from Level 5 of the English profile. These were the most difficult tasks in the Survey (above about 500 on the reading scale). Two examples are shown below.

Task 6 requires the interpretation of idiomatic language and was developed to address the ‘text’ outcome: Discusses themes and issues in accessible texts with challenging structures and ideas, and constructs responses interpreting these.

Task 23 assesses students’ abilities to recognise the connection between presentation style and the nature of the information (in this instance, question and answer format for interview data). This task was developed to address the ‘linguistic structures and features’ outcome: Draws on knowledge of linguistic structures and features to explain how texts are constructed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task 6</th>
<th>answered correctly by 22% of Year 5 students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Why was the spacething “Last, but not least”?’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task 23</th>
<th>answered correctly by 9% of Year 5 students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Why is the article written in this style?’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other tasks in this region of the reading scale assess the ability to infer meaning from figurative language, and to identify the cultural meaning of an image.

Questions in this range were given to Year 5 students only. Fewer than 25% of Year 5 students were able to answer questions of this kind.

MEASURING READING ACHIEVEMENT

Each student’s performances on the reading common tasks have been used to construct a measure of that student’s reading achievement: in other words, to estimate that student’s level of attainment on the Survey reading scale.

Figure 3.12 summarises the distributions of Year 3 and Year 5 students’ reading measures. The distributions of reading measures are shown here as ‘box and whisker’ plots which indicate the levels on the reading scale achieved by 10%, 20%, 50%, 80% and 90% of students in each Year group. The number inside each box is the median of the distribution.

For the purposes of establishing baseline measures of Year 3 and Year 5 reading achievement against which performances in future English literacy surveys might be compared, the estimated Year 3 and Year 5 population means and standard deviations have been calculated and are reported in Table 3.10. The sampling standard errors of the means are shown. The estimated population means and standard deviations shown here reflect the decision to report reading measures on a scale defined by setting the Year 3 mean at 300 and standard deviation at 100.
Figure 3.12 Distributions of students' estimated reading achievements.
Table 3.10 shows that the difference between the average reading achievement at Year 5 and the average reading achievement at Year 3 is 85 points on the reading scale, or 0.85 of the standard deviation at Year 3. The figures on which these estimates are based are shown in the left-hand column. From Figure 3.12 it can be seen that this growth from Year 3 to Year 5 is slightly less than a full profile level.

The overlap in the Year 3 and Year 5 reading distributions in Figure 3.12 is consistent with the findings of other recent studies, including reading achievement surveys in Western Australia (Titmanis et al., 1993) and Victoria (Rowe, Hill & Holmes-Smith, 1994).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=3621</td>
<td>300 (± 2)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=3619</td>
<td>385 (± 2)</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Figures 3.13 to 3.15 show the distributions of students’ reading measures for three subgroups of the population: male/female; English/language other than English background; and low, medium and high socio-economic background.

From Figure 3.13 it can be seen that Year 3 females are, on average, achieving at a higher level in reading than Year 3 males. The median estimate for Year 3 females is 311 on the reading achievement scale, and the median estimate for Year 3 males, 286. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median estimated achievement levels are 399 and 373 respectively.

There is no significant change in the relative reading achievements of males and females between Year 3 and Year 5: females achieve about 25 points (a quarter of a standard deviation for all students) higher than males at both Year levels. The finding that girls have higher reading achievement levels than boys is consistent with the findings of many other studies of primary school reading.

From Figure 3.14 it can be seen that students from English-speaking backgrounds are, on average, achieving at a higher level in reading than students from homes in which the main language spoken is a language other than English.

The median for Year 3 English-background students is 301, and for students from backgrounds other than English, 274. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median achievement of English-background students is 389, and of languages other than English students, 353.

The difference between English background and non-English background students’ average reading achievements increases from 27 at Year 3 to 36 at Year 5.

Figure 3.15 shows that students from high socio-economic backgrounds are, on average, achieving at a higher level in reading than students from medium socio-economic backgrounds who, in turn, are achieving at a higher level in reading than students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Students in the high SES group are children of parents in upper professional and managerial occupations; students in the medium SES group, children of parents in clerical and skilled manual occupations; and students in the low SES group, children of parents in unskilled manual occupations.

The median reading achievement of Year 3 students from high socio-economic backgrounds is 348, from medium SES backgrounds, 295; and from low SES backgrounds, 263. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median reading achievement estimates are 440, 376, and 325 for students from high, medium, and low SES backgrounds.

Figure 3.15 shows a much greater difference between students from low and high SES backgrounds at Year 5 than at Year 3. The gap between these two groups widens from 85 points in Year 3 to 115 points in Year 5.

An interesting feature of Figure 3.15 is that the median reading achievement of Year 3 students from high socio-economic backgrounds is higher than the median reading achievements of Year 5 students from low SES backgrounds.
FIGURE 3.13 DISTRIBUTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS' ESTIMATED READING ACHIEVEMENTS
Figure 3.14 Distributions of English-speaking and other than English-speaking background students’ estimated reading achievements.
Fig. 3.15 Distributions of Low, Medium and High Socio-economic Status Students' Estimated Reading Achievements
Students in the Special Indigenous Sample also completed the Survey reading tasks. The performances of these students on the common tasks have been used to estimate their levels of achievement on the reading scale (see Figure 3.16).

In interpreting the reading performances of the Special Indigenous Sample, it must be remembered that this was not a representative sample of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 3 and 5, but a sample of students in schools reporting five or more Indigenous students at both Year 3 and Year 5.

From Figure 3.16 it can be seen that almost all Year 3 Special Indigenous Sample students are estimated to be working in profile Levels 1 and 2 in reading. Some 50% of students are estimated to have reading achievements in Level 1 or beginning Level 2. There is also a greater spread of reading levels in the Special Indigenous Sample than in the main sample (the standard deviation is 22% greater than in the main sample).

Most Year 5 Special Indigenous Sample students are estimated to be working in profile Levels 2 and 3. The reading tasks given to Year 5 students did not include Level 1 tasks. It seems likely, however, from their performances on Level 2 tasks, that perhaps 35% of Year 5 students are still reading at Level 1.

An interesting feature of Figure 3.16 is the difference between the 90th percentile at Year 3 and the 90th percentile at Year 5. There appears to be considerable growth of the best readers between Year 3 and Year 5, perhaps because many of these students are mastering English as a second language. On the other hand, the bottom 20% of readers appear to make very little progress between Year 3 and Year 5.

The mean and standard deviation of the Year 3 and Year 5 reading measures for the Special Indigenous Sample are shown in Table 3.11. Notice that the large sampling error on the mean is the result of the relatively small number of students (left-hand column) in this sample.

| Table 3.11 Special Indigenous Sample students’ Reading means and standard deviations |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Year 3                        | N=314                   | Mean (error) | Standard Deviation |
|                               |                         | 135 (±7)     | 122                |
| Year 5                        | N=359                   | 223 (±7)     | 129                |
Recognises the connection between presentation style and nature of information (e.g., question & answer format for interview data).

Infers meaning from figurative language.

Interprets idiomatic language (e.g., "last but not least").

Recognises how linguistic features (e.g., exclamation marks) support ideas implicit in a text.

Selects several pieces of information from a complex presentation of text.

Recognises probable context for a piece of writing.

Explains an author’s point of view.

Recognises the tone of a simple piece.

Orders detailed events from a narrative.

Recognises conventional linguistic features (e.g., pronunciation guides).

Interprets factual information.

Recognises the relationship between two pieces of text.

Generates research question to explore topic about which they have read.

Works out meaning of unknown word from context and picture clues.

Finds evidence to support a statement.

Orders instructions in a procedure.

Extracts information from complex presentation of text and pictures.

Infers missing step in a procedure.

Recognises main idea in paragraph of actual text.

Decides whether writing is fact or fiction based on described events.

Recognises text genre from book title.

Makes connections between pieces of factual info. in simple text.

Predicts a plausible ending for an illustrated story.

Recognises how elements of an illustration support text in a story.

Uses title and illustration to predict setting.

Interprets picture to predict what happens next in illustrated story.

Uses book title and illustration to identify key elements of story.

Figure 3.16 Distributions of estimated reading achievements for the Special Indigenous Sample
Percentages Working in Profile Levels

Because the reading tasks used in the Survey were designed to provide information about reading outcomes in the English profile for Australian schools, and because the indicators on the Survey reading scale describe these tasks, it has been possible to ‘map’ the levels of the English profile on to the Survey reading scale (as shown in Figure 3.10).

The mapping of profile levels on to the reading scale has made it possible to estimate the percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students working in each profile level, based on their performances on the common tasks. These percentages are shown in Table 3.12 below.

To make these estimates it was necessary to decide what it meant for a student to be ‘working in’ a profile level. A student was judged to be ‘working in’ a level if they were likely to succeed on 50% of at least the easiest reading tasks from that level. (This method recognises a range of reading achievements within each level. The lowest achieving students working within a level are likely to succeed on 50% of the easiest items from that level; the highest achieving students working within the same level are likely to succeed on 50% of the most difficult items from that level.)

The percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students in the Special Indigenous Sample working in each level are shown in Table 3.13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.12 Percentage of students working in each profile level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
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<td>--------</td>
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<td>Level 5</td>
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<td>Level 1</td>
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<th>Table 3.13 Percentage of Special Indigenous Sample students working in each profile level</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Level 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
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<td>Level 3</td>
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<td>Level 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>and below</td>
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</table>
The 1996 National School English Literacy Survey included an assessment of the viewing achievements of Year 3 and Year 5 students.

**What Was Assessed?**

In assessing levels of viewing achievement, special attention was paid to:

- students' abilities to interpret a range of fiction and non-fiction viewed texts with a degree of critical awareness;
- students' abilities to understand the main themes, ideas and points of view expressed in viewed texts;
- students' appreciations of the script writer’s craft; and
- students' awareness of the relationship between the medium and the message in viewed text.

Within this broad framework, viewing assessment tasks were developed with reference to the outcomes of the English profile. Assessment procedures were designed to address a range of relevant profile outcomes in viewing (see pages 257 and 259–260).

**How Was Viewing Assessed? — The Common Tasks**

Students' levels of viewing achievement were assessed by having them view one or more short films and answer a series of questions. Classroom teachers then read and made judgements about the quality of their students' responses using provided assessment guides.

The films viewed by students included:

- narrative text (literary experience) at Year 3 and Year 5;
- documentary text (information retrieval) at Year 5 only; and
- procedural text (how to perform a task) at Year 5 only.

Year 3 and Year 5 students attempted different viewing tasks. Year 3 students completed a total of 18 viewing tasks; Year 5 students completed 21.

These tasks required students to:

- form initial understandings of text
  eg In the forest it was mother owl’s job to...
- reflect on themes, ideas and points of view expressed in text
  eg According to the film, mosquitoes buzz in people’s ears because...
- These stills are from the last two scenes. Imagine that the film makers were discussing which scene should end the film. Write an argument for each film maker.
  eg The makers of a new computer game want to advertise during this show. Why do you think they want to advertise their product during this show?
- develop individual interpretations of text
  eg In this story, does Mosquito ever get punished for all the trouble she has caused? Explain your answer.
FIGURE 3.17 SOME INDICATORS ON THE SURVEY VIEWING SCALE

- Explains the appropriateness of a concluding scene with reference to the tone of a film.
- Explains a text detail in terms of its contribution to text structure (e.g., music to open and close a film).
- Identifies elements contributing to the tone of a film (e.g., recognises the use of parody).
- Identifies a range of techniques used to establish mood (e.g., slow motion).
- Recognises that films deliberately focus viewers’ attention.
- Infers aspects of a character’s personality.
- Justifies own interpretation of a text (e.g., refers to plot or tone when interpreting choice of film props).
- Recognises the central thematic significance of an event (opening scene).
- Predicts instructions for filmed procedure recognising instructional style.
- Explains the central significance of a prop.
- Predicts narrative ending by attending to central theme.
- Identifies some techniques used to establish mood.
- Explains the concluding scene in a film by reference to the plot.
- Recognises how different perspectives of an event are represented.
- Identifies a key idea in a short children’s film.
- Explains a text detail by referring to its immediate context only.
- Constructs plausible arguments for different points of view.
- Recognises that voice-overs are used as a narrative device.
- Predicts basic verbal instructions for a filmed procedure.
- Recognises a role for an event without understanding its central narrative significance.
- Recognises a cause of conflict in a story.
- Explains the concluding scene in a film in terms of peripheral detail only.
- Recalls some steps in a procedure.
- Resolves an element of a narrative by attending to peripheral detail only.
- Summarises a narrative focusing on peripheral detail only.
- Identifies and understands a character’s role in a story.
- Orders pictures from a film sequence.
- Identifies a central film prop.
- Recalls some film details.
- Expresses personal views about a character’s actions.
reflect on the construction of text including language conventions

eg Why does the storyteller repeat himself when he says, 'Mother owl was so sad, so sad, so sad'?

elements of the writer’s craft

eg List three ways that the film makers have made Python seem scary.

Choose one of the locations where this program was filmed and explain how you think it adds to the story of Possum’s life.

THE VIEWING SCALE

Students’ performances on the Survey tasks have been used to construct a scale of increasing achievement in viewing. This scale is shown in Figure 3.17. The construction of the scale is described on page 295.

The viewing scale is empirically based: in other words, it is based on an analysis of observed student performances in the Survey. The viewing indicators in Figure 3.17 are derived from some, but not all, of the Survey tasks.

The indicator lowest on the scale, expresses personal views about a character’s actions describes the easiest viewing task in the Survey. This task, given only to Year 3 students, asks students to imagine what they would have done if they had been a character in the story. This was the viewing task most often completed correctly, placing it lower on the viewing scale than all other viewing indicators.

The indicator highest on the scale, explains the appropriateness of a concluding scene with reference to the tone of a film describes the most difficult viewing task in the Survey. This task, given only to Year 5 students, assesses text understanding by asking students to reflect on the appropriateness of the concluding scene to a film.

Each indicator in Figure 3.17 is located on the viewing scale according to the level of difficulty students experienced in completing that task.

On the right of Figure 3.17 an attempt has been made to show the approximate relationship between these indicators and the viewing levels of the English profile.

At about Level 2, students recall some details from viewed texts with familiar constructions, recognise main ideas in viewed text, and have some insight into the construction of narrative text.

At about Level 3, students interpret and discuss relationships between ideas in viewed text. For example, they summarise a narrative, recognise how different perspectives of an event are represented, and identify some film techniques.

At about Level 4, students justify their own interpretations of information in texts containing unfamiliar concepts, and discuss the ways in which film is constructed. Examples include explaining the central significance of a film prop, and identifying a range of techniques used to establish mood.
At about Level 5, students discuss themes and issues in viewed texts with challenging structures and ideas, recognise the purposes and audiences for which texts are constructed, and draw on knowledge of linguistic structures and features to explain how texts are constructed. Examples include identifying elements contributing to the tone of a film, explaining a text detail in terms of its contribution to text structure (music to open and close a film), and explaining the appropriateness of a concluding scene with reference to the tone of a film.

**The Viewing Scale — Examples**

Figure 3.18 shows all Survey tasks calibrated on the viewing scale. The tasks most often answered correctly are at the bottom of the figure; the tasks least often answered correctly are at the top. Some tasks (e.g., Task 13, Year 3) were in two parts and the difficulties of the two parts are shown separately (13.1 and 13.2).

It can be seen from this picture that the tasks given to Year 3 students were in general easier than the tasks given to Year 5 students. (The ‘equating’ procedure used to position Year 3 and Year 5 viewing tasks on the same scale is described on page 287.) Most tasks given to Year 3 students address outcomes from Levels 2 and 3 of the English profile; most tasks given to Year 5 students address outcomes from Levels 3 and 4.

Within this full set of common tasks, eleven tasks have been highlighted (white on black) for closer consideration. These four Year 3 tasks and seven Year 5 tasks are used below to illustrate levels of achievement on the Survey viewing scale.

**Level 2 viewing**

A number of viewing tasks given to Year 3 and Year 5 students address outcomes from Level 2 of the English profile. These tasks tend to calibrate in the range 90 to 275 on the viewing scale. Three examples are shown below.

Task 5 (Year 3) asks students to order pictures from a film sequence. Task 2 (Year 3) assesses students’ understanding of a character’s role in a story. Task 2.1 (Year 5) assesses understanding of the role of a central film prop. These three tasks were written to address the ‘texts’ outcome: *Constructs and retells meanings from visual texts with predictable narrative structures.*

Other tasks in this region of the viewing scale assess the ability to recall some film details, to summarise a narrative, to resolve elements of a narrative focusing on peripheral detail only, to recall some steps in a procedure, to explain the concluding scene in a film in terms of peripheral detail only, to recognise a cause of conflict in a story, and to recognise a role for an event without understanding its central narrative significance.

Tasks in this range were given to both Year 3 and Year 5 students. Between 50% and 85% of Year 3 students and between 70% and 95% of Year 5 students were able to complete tasks of this kind.
Figure 3.18 Common tasks calibrated on the Survey viewing scale.
Task 5
answered correctly by 83% of Year 3 students

‘Number the boxes in the right order to show what has happened in the story so far. The first one has been done for you.’

Task 2
answered correctly by 70% of Year 3 students

‘In the forest, it was mother owl’s job to.........’

Task 2.1
answered correctly by 92% of Year 5 students

‘What is Jason holding and why is it important to the film?’
LEVEL 3 VIEWING

A large number of Survey tasks in viewing address outcomes from Level 3 of the English profile. These tasks tend to calibrate in the range 275 to 400 on the viewing scale. Four examples are shown below.

Task 10 (Year 3) asks students to compare two stills from the video and to explain why these two perspectives on the same event are used. To complete Task 8.2 (Year 5), students summarise a narrative. At this level of response, summaries focus on the central theme of the narrative rather than on peripheral detail. These tasks were developed to address the ‘texts’ outcome: Interprets and discusses some relationships between ideas, information and events in visual texts designed for general viewing.

Task 6.1 asks students to reflect on the use of a voice-over. At this level of viewing achievement, students recognise that voice-overs are used as a narrative device. Task 6.1 addresses the ‘linguistic structures and features’ outcome: Identifies and uses the linguistic structures and features characteristic of a range of text types to construct meaning.

---

**Task 10**
answered correctly by 39% of Year 3 students

‘Why do we see both of these pictures in the story? Explain your answer.’

![Two stills from a video]

**Task 8.2**
answered correctly by 47% of Year 5 students

‘Imagine this is part of a TV guide.
Finish the short description of the film so people will know what it is about.

4:30  *Looking for Space Things*  A short children’s film about.....’
Task 9
answered correctly by 59% of Year 5 students

‘These stills are from the last two scenes. Imagine that the film makers were discussing which scene should end the film. Write an argument for each film maker.’

Task 6.1
answered correctly by 62% of Year 5 students

‘Why does the film use a voice-over (the person telling the story) to tell you some parts of the story?’

Other tasks in this region of the viewing scale assess the ability to predict basic verbal instructions for a filmed procedure, to construct plausible arguments for different points of view, to identify a key idea in a short children’s film, to explain the concluding scene in
a film by reference to the plot, to identify some techniques used to establish mood, and to predict narrative ending by attending to the central theme of a story.

Tasks in this range were given to both Year 3 and Year 5 students. Between 30% and 50% of Year 3 and 45% and 70% of Year 5 students were able to complete tasks of this kind.

**LEVEL 4 VIEWING**

A number of Survey tasks in viewing addressed outcomes from Level 4 of the English profile. These tasks tend to calibrate in the range 400 to 500 on the viewing scale. Three examples are shown below.

Task 13.2 (Year 3) assesses students’ abilities to recognise the central thematic significance of an opening scene in a film. Task 16.2 (Year 5) asks students to think about the special effects used to make a scene more dramatic and to identify a range of techniques used to establish mood (e.g., camera angles, slow motion and music). These tasks were written to address the ‘linguistic structures and features’ outcome: *With teacher guidance, identifies and discusses how linguistic structures and features work to shape readers’ and viewers’ understanding of texts.*

In Task 5 students justify their own interpretation of an element of text. They explain why a particular car was selected for use in the film. This task was written to address the ‘text’ outcome: *Justifies own interpretation of ideas, information and events in texts containing some unfamiliar concepts and topics and which introduce relatively complex linguistic structures and features.*

Other tasks in this region of the viewing scale assess the ability to explain the central significance of a prop, to predict instructions for filming a procedure recognising instructional style, to infer aspects of a character’s personality, and to recognise that films deliberately focus viewers’ attention.

Tasks in this range were given to both Year 3 and Year 5 students. Between 10% and 30% of Year 3 and 20% and 45% of Year 5 students were able to complete tasks of this kind.

---

**Task 13.2**

answered correctly by 28% of Year 3 students

‘Why does the story start with the sun rising?’

**Task 16.2**

answered correctly by 28% of Year 5 students

‘The second time the film makers show Possum climbing the wall they use a number of special effects that make the scene more dramatic.

List three of the special effects they use.

1............

2............

3............’

**Task 5**

answered correctly by 37% of Year 5 students

‘Suppose that the film makers could have used any car they wanted in the film. Why do you think they chose this type of car for Mrs Flinders?’

---

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Literacy Achievements— Viewing
Some Survey tasks in viewing addressed outcomes from Level 5 of the English profile. These were the most difficult tasks in the Survey (above about 500 on the scale). Two examples are shown below.

Task 15.2 answered correctly by 17% of Year 5 students

‘Why have the film makers included footage of Rick playing the guitar?’

Task 7 answered correctly by 23% of Year 5 students

‘Near the end of the film we see Mr and Mrs Flinders, Nina and Jason having spaghetti together. The voice-over says, “It was sort of...happily ever...you know.” Why doesn’t the voice-over say, “It was happily ever after”?’

Task 15.2 asks students to explain a text detail (the use of music) in terms of its contribution to the overall text structure (to open and close a film). To complete Task 7, students need to identify a film element which contributes to the tone of the film. These tasks were written to address the ‘linguistic structures and features’ outcome: \textit{Draws on knowledge of linguistic structures and features to explain how texts are constructed.}

Another task in this region of the viewing scale assesses the ability to explain the appropriateness of a concluding scene with reference to the tone of a film.

Tasks in this range were given to Year 5 students only. Fewer than 20% of Year 5 students were able to complete tasks of this kind.
Each student’s performances on the viewing common tasks have been used to construct a measure of that student’s viewing achievement: in other words, to estimate that student’s level of attainment on the Survey viewing scale.

Figure 3.19 summarises the distributions of Year 3 and Year 5 students’ viewing measures. The distributions of viewing measures are shown here as ‘box and whisker’ plots which indicate the levels on the viewing scale achieved by 10%, 20%, 50%, 80% and 90% of students in each Year group. The number inside each box is the median of the distribution.

For the purposes of establishing baseline measures of Year 3 and Year 5 viewing achievement against which performances in future English literacy surveys might be compared, the estimated Year 3 and Year 5 population means and standard deviations have been calculated and are reported in Table 3.14. The sampling standard errors of the means are shown. The estimated population means and standard deviations shown here reflect the decision to report viewing measures on a scale defined by setting the Year 3 mean at 300 and standard deviation at 100.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=3699</td>
<td>300 (± 2)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=3599</td>
<td>378 (± 2)</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.14 shows that the difference between the average viewing achievement at Year 5 and the average viewing achievement at Year 3 is 78 points on the viewing scale, or 0.78 of the standard deviation at Year 3. From Figure 3.19 it can be seen that this growth from Year 3 to Year 5 is less than a full profile level.
Explains the appropriateness of a concluding scene with reference to the tone of a film.

Explains a text detail in terms of its contribution to text structure (e.g., music to open and close a film).

Identifies elements contributing to the tone of a film (e.g., recognises the use of parody).

Identifies a range of techniques used to establish mood (e.g., slow motion).

Recognises that films deliberately focus viewers’ attention.

Infers aspects of a character’s personality.

Justifies own interpretation of a text (e.g., refers to plot or tone when interpreting choice of film props).

Recognises the central thematic significance of an event (opening scene).

Predicts instructions for filmed procedure recognising instructional style.

Explains the central significance of a prop.

Explains the concluding scene in terms of peripheral detail only.

Identifies some techniques used to establish mood.

Predicts narrative ending by attending to central theme.

Recognises a role for an event without understanding its central narrative significance.

Recognises a cause of conflict in a story.

Identifies and understands a character’s role in a story.

Orders pictures from a film sequence.

Identifies a central film prop.

Recalls some film details.

Expresses personal views about a character’s actions.
Figures 3.20 to 3.22 show the distributions of students’ viewing measures for three subgroupings of the population: male/female; English/language other than English background; and low, medium and high socio-economic background.

Figure 3.20 shows that Year 3 females are, on average, achieving at a slightly higher level in viewing than Year 3 males. The median estimate for Year 3 females is 303 on the viewing achievement scale and the median estimate for Year 3 males, 287. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median estimated achievement levels are 386 and 370 respectively.

There is no change in the relative viewing achievements of males and females between Year 3 and Year 5: females achieve 16 points (0.16 of a standard deviation for all students) higher than males at both Year levels. Achievements for both males and females are slightly more spread at Year 3 than Year 5.

From Figure 3.21 it can be seen that students from homes where the main language spoken is English are, on average, achieving at a higher level in viewing than students from homes where a language other than English is spoken.

The median for Year 3 English-background students is 297, and for language other than English students, 258. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median viewing achievement of English-background students is 380, and of language other than English background students, 348. At each Year level, the scores of students from homes where English is the main language spoken are slightly more spread than students from homes where the main language is a language other than English. The spread of scores for both groups decreases from Year 3 to Year 5.

Figure 3.22 shows that students of high socio-economic status (SES) are, on average, at each Year level, achieving at a higher level in viewing than students of medium SES who, in turn, are achieving at a higher level in viewing than students of low SES. Students in the high SES group are children of parents in upper professional and managerial occupations; students in the medium SES group, children of parents in clerical and skilled manual occupations; and students in the low SES group, children of parents in unskilled manual occupations.

The median viewing achievement of Year 3 students from high socio-economic backgrounds is 340, from medium SES backgrounds, 285; and from low SES backgrounds, 264. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median writing achievement estimates are 413, 375, and 344 for students from high, medium, and low SES backgrounds.

An interesting feature of Figure 3.22 is the similar achievement of Year 3 students from high SES and Year 5 students from low SES. The median viewing achievement of Year 3 students from high SES backgrounds is only slightly lower than the median viewing achievement of Year 5 students from low SES. The median achievement of the more able students in this Year 3 group (above the 90th percentile) is well above the median for Year 5 students from high SES.

A second interesting feature is the spread of scores for the Year 5 students from low SES. The least able students (below the 10th percentile) in this group are achieving well below the median viewing achievement of low SES Year 3 students; the most able (above the 90th percentile) are achieving well above the median viewing achievement of high SES students in Year 5.
Explains the appropriateness of a concluding scene with reference to the tone of a film.

Identifies elements contributing to the tone of a film (e.g., recognises the use of parody).

Identifies a range of techniques used to establish mood (e.g., slow motion).

Recognises that films deliberately focus the viewer’s attention.

Infers aspects of a character’s personality.

Justifies own interpretation of a text (e.g., refers to plot or tone when interpreting choice of film props).

Recognises the central thematic significance of an event (opening scene).

Justifies own interpretation of a text (e.g., refers to plot or tone when interpreting choice of film props).

Predicts instructions for filmed procedure recognising instructional style.

Explains the central significance of a prop.

Explains the concluding scene with reference to plot.

Recognises a role for an event without understanding its central narrative significance.

Recognises a cause of conflict in a story.

Explains the concluding scene in a film in terms of peripheral detail only.

Recalls some steps in a procedure.

Resolves an element of a narrative by attending to peripheral detail only.

Identifies and understands a character’s role in a story.

Orders pictures from a film sequence.

Identifies a central film prop.

Recalls some film details.

Expresses personal views about a character’s actions.

**Figure 3.20 Distributions of male and female students’ estimated viewing achievements**
FIGURE 3.21 DISTRIBUTIONS OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND AND OTHER THAN ENGLISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND STUDENTS’ ESTIMATED VIEWING ACHIEVEMENTS
**Figure 3.22** Distributions of low, medium, and high socio-economic status students’ estimated viewing achievements.
The performances of these students on the common tasks have been used to estimate their levels of achievement on the viewing scale (see Figure 3.23).

In interpreting the viewing performances of the Special Indigenous Sample, it must be remembered that this was not a representative sample of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 3 and 5, but a sample of students in schools reporting five or more Indigenous students at both Year 3 and Year 5.

From Figure 3.23 it can be seen that most Year 3 students in the Special Indigenous Sample are estimated to be working in profile Level 2 in viewing, and most Year 5 students, in profile Levels 2 and 3. There is a greater spread of viewing achievement in the Special Indigenous Sample at both Years 3 and 5 than in the main national sample.

An interesting feature of Figure 3.23 is the difference between the 10th percentile at Year 3 and the 10th percentile at Year 5. There appears to be considerable growth for this group of students between Year 3 and Year 5.

The mean and standard deviation of the Year 3 and Year 5 viewing measures for the Special Indigenous Sample are shown in Table 3.15. Notice that the large sampling error on the mean is the result of the relatively small number of students in this sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Estimated Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=348</td>
<td>154 (± 7)</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Estimated Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=357</td>
<td>236 (± 7)</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 3.23 DISTRIBUTIONS OF ESTIMATED VIEWING ACHIEVEMENTS FOR THE SPECIAL INDIGENOUS SAMPLE

Explains the appropriateness of a concluding scene with reference to the tone of a film.

Explains a text detail in terms of its contribution to text structure (eg music to open and close a film).

Identifies elements contributing to the tone of a film (eg recognises the use of parody).

Identifies a range of techniques used to establish mood (eg slow motion).

Recognises that films deliberately focus viewers’ attention.

Infers aspects of a character’s personality.

Justifies own interpretation of a text (eg refers to plot or tone when interpreting choice of film props).

Recognises the central thematic significance of an event (opening scene).

Predicts instructions for filmed procedure recognising instructional style.

Explains the central significance of a prop.

Predicts narrative ending by attending to central theme.

Identifies a role for an event without understanding its central narrative significance.

Recognises a cause of conflict in a story.

Explains the concluding scene in a film by reference to the plot.

Recognises how different perspectives of an event are represented.

Identifies a central film prop.

Recognises that voice-overs are used as a narrative device.

Predicts basic verbal instructions for a filmed procedure.

Recognises a role for an event without understanding its central narrative significance.

Identifies and understands a character’s actions in a story.

Orders pictures from a film sequence.

Identifies a central prop.

Recalls some film details.

Expresses personal views about a character’s actions.

Recalls some steps in a procedure.

Resolves an element of a narrative by attending to peripheral detail only.

Summarises a narrative focusing on peripheral detail only.

Identifies and understands a character’s actions in a story.

Recalls some film details.

Expresses personal views about a character’s actions.
Because the viewing tasks used in the Survey were designed to provide information about viewing outcomes in the English profile for Australian schools, and because the indicators on the Survey viewing scale describe these tasks, it has been possible to ‘map’ the levels of the English profile on to the Survey viewing scale (as shown in Figure 3.17).

The mapping of profile levels on to the viewing scale has made it possible to estimate the percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students working in each profile level, based on their performances on the common tasks. These percentages are shown in Table 3.16.

To make these estimates it was necessary to decide what it meant for a student to be ‘working in’ a profile level. A student was judged to be ‘working in’ a level if they were likely to succeed on 50% of at least the easiest viewing tasks from that level. (This method recognises a range of viewing achievements within each level. The lowest achieving students working within a level are likely to succeed on 50% of the easiest items from that level; the highest achieving students working within the same level are likely to succeed on 50% of the most difficult items from that level.)

The percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students in the Special Indigenous Sample working in each level are shown in Table 3.17.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.16 Percentage of students working in each profile level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.17 Percentage of Special Indigenous Sample students working in each profile level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 1996 National School English Literacy Survey included an assessment of the speaking achievements of Year 3 and Year 5 students.

**What Was Assessed?**

In assessing levels of speaking achievement, special attention was paid to students’ abilities to:

- use spoken language effectively as required by the formal school environment;
- express the main ideas in text to others;
- describe and explain ideas to others; and
- engage the listener.

Within this broad framework, speaking assessment tasks were developed with reference to the outcomes of the English profile. Assessment procedures were designed to address a range of relevant profile outcomes in speaking (see pages 256 and 258–259).

**How Was Speaking Assessed?**

Students’ levels of speaking achievement were assessed by having them complete a set of speaking tasks under controlled conditions (‘common tasks’) and by collecting records of speaking performances in the classroom within specified categories (‘best work’). Classroom teachers made judgements about the quality of their students’ speaking using provided assessment guides.

**Common Tasks**

The speaking common tasks completed by students included:

- narrative presentation (telling a story or poem to entertain); and
- argument/opinion presentation (offering an opinion to convince a listener).

Year 3 students retold their favourite narrative, and reviewed a character from the provided videotape. Year 5 students talked about their favourite TV show and discussed a poem in small groups in preparation for individual presentation and commentary.

Individual presentations required students to consider the ways in which spoken text is used to communicate meaning through:

- content of presentation (quality of ideas and ability to justify opinions); and
- performance elements (awareness of, and ability to engage, the audience).

Teachers made on-the-spot judgements of students’ common task performances. Both Year 3 and Year 5 students completed two common tasks in speaking.

**Best Work**

Students’ best work in speaking was assembled by teachers in three specified categories. Teachers were asked to base their assessments on two speaking performances/presentations:

- a reflective/discursive piece (a performance/presentation of a personal narrative, or a response to an issue eg morning talk or debate); and either
- an imaginative piece (eg a performance/presentation of a narrative, poem or play); or
- a piece from a subject area other than English (eg a science report, an individual project, a report on a group activity in mathematics).
Teachers were asked to provide records made at the time of these student presentations or, if available, video or audio recordings of the presentations. Teachers made assessments of students’ speaking performances by reviewing their written records, or the video or audio recordings. Two samples of speaking work were collected for Year 3 and Year 5 students.

**The Speaking Scale**

Students’ performances on the National School English Literacy Survey tasks were used to construct a scale of increasing achievement in speaking. This scale is shown in Figure 3.24. The construction of the scale is described on pages 292–295.

The speaking scale is empirically based: in other words, it is based on an analysis of observed student performances in the Survey. The speaking indicators (descriptions of observed speaking behaviours) in Figure 3.24 are derived from the Survey tasks. Indicators which relate to performance elements of students’ presentations are italicised.

The cluster of indicators lowest on the scale, including
- expresses ideas simply and conveys limited meaning
- presents a disjointed or incomplete story
  - *shows limited understanding of the need to communicate with an audience*
  - *speaks inaudibly at times*

describes the lowest level of achievement in speaking in the Survey.

The cluster of indicators highest on the scale, including
- presents a well-reasoned account
- displays a sense of key issues
- consistently enhances presentation with relevant detail
  - *begins to engage audience through language, gesture, tone*

 describes the highest level of achievement in speaking in the Survey.

On the right of Figure 3.24 an attempt has been made to show the approximate relationship between these clusters of indicators and the Speaking levels of the English profile.

At about Level 1, students express ideas simply, showing an emerging awareness of school purposes and expectations for spoken language.

At about Level 2, students speak with more confidence in structured school situations, showing a basic understanding of the demands of a formal speaking task.

At about Level 3, students begin to adapt spoken language to suit a formal context. They begin to organise their presentations and to consider audience response.

At about Level 4, students are aware of the ways in which speech can entertain, inform and influence others. They plan their presentations and show a consistent sense of audience.

At about Level 5, students effectively use appropriate language and organisational elements in formal presentations, and begin to experiment with ways to influence audiences.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level  5</th>
<th>Level  4</th>
<th>Level  3</th>
<th>Level  2</th>
<th>Level  1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presents a well-reasoned account.</td>
<td>Displays a sense of key issues.</td>
<td>Presents challenging ideas.</td>
<td>Effectively uses appropriate language and/or organisational elements appropriate to genre.</td>
<td>Consistently enhances presentation with relevant detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives considered reasons for opinions (generally justifies assertions).</td>
<td>Begins to engage audience through language, gesture, tone.</td>
<td>Presents complete and well-organised account (eg well-rounded story including details).</td>
<td>Attempts to justify assertions (eg 'It's a funny show because of the way... ').</td>
<td>Presents a strong point of view (eg about a favourite character).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows a good, consistent sense of audience.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Attempts to generalise about aspects of topic (eg includes synopsis of show, as opposed to retelling one episode).</td>
<td>Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation), with good natural expression.</td>
<td>Has a good, consistent sense of audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows some evidence of organisation (presentation may be muddled or incomplete).</td>
<td>Gives a full account of a character, experience or event including all key information.</td>
<td>Justifies opinions with mostly descriptive information (eg 'Python was a baddie because he scared rabbit out of her hole').</td>
<td>Offers a few arguments, mostly assertions.</td>
<td>Tells a complete story with a logical plot but lacking in detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation), with good natural expression but shows little awareness of the audience.</td>
<td>Shows a good, consistent sense of audience (looks around, smiles) but speaks less confidently.</td>
<td>Tells a story with a recognisable plot.</td>
<td>Offers one or two comments or opinions with little or no justification.</td>
<td>Includes some key information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows a basic understanding of speaking task.</td>
<td>Speaks audibly but with little sense of addressing audience (eg may be 'little eye contact where culturally appropriate).</td>
<td>Shows limited understanding of speaking task (may stray from original intent).</td>
<td>Shows limited understanding of the need to communicate with an audience.</td>
<td>Speaks inaudibly at times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 3.24 INDICATORS ON THE SURVEY SPEAKING SCALE**
**THE SPEAKING SCALE — EXAMPLES**

To illustrate the five levels on the Survey speaking scale, a number of samples of teacher records have been selected and are reproduced below. Because students’ presentations were assessed separately for content and performance, some presentations were assessed at different levels on these two features (e.g. Level 3 for content, but Level 2 for performance). For purposes of illustration, the samples shown below are drawn from presentations which were assessed at the same Level on content and performance.

**LEVEL 1 SPEAKING**

The lowest rating assigned to student speaking was Level 1.

An example of a teacher’s written record of a Level 1 speaking performance is shown below. This record suggests that the student’s performance was brief, with ideas expressed simply. There was little understanding of the need to communicate with the audience.

Content: Level 1  
Performance: Level 1

```
Very brief description of group activity — we made rainforest.  
No other explanation given.  
One word at a time, very hard to hear.
```

Teachers assigned a rating of Level 1 to about 6% of Year 3 students’ common task speaking performances (see pages 277–279).

**LEVEL 2 SPEAKING**

An example of a teacher’s written record of a Level 2 speaking performance is shown below. This record suggests that the presentation showed a basic understanding of the task, included key information, but was not well organised. There was little sense of addressing the audience.

Content: Level 2  
Performance: Level 2

```
Aaron  
Information was interesting but not well organised. He had a basic understanding of what was required.  
Presentation:  
Read straight off notes  
Not read fluently, stumbling  
Argument wasn’t clear
```
Teachers assigned a rating of Level 2 to approximately 31% of Year 3 speaking performances and 14% of Year 5 speaking performances (see pages 277–279).

**LEVEL 3 SPEAKING**

An example of a teacher’s written record of a Level 3 speaking performance is shown below. This record suggests that the student’s presentation showed evidence of organisation (eg written text and props). The speaker showed a clear sense of audience most of the time.

Content: Level 3

Performance: Level 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC: Softball</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIME: 45 secs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- animated presentation
- read, rather than refer to notes at times
- showed softball uniform and equipment
- audience eye contact most of the time
- clear speech, good expression and volume

Teachers assigned a rating of Level 3 to approximately 46% of Year 3 students’ spoken presentations, and 43–48% of Year 5 students’ speaking performances (see pages 277–279).
LEVEL 4 SPEAKING

An example of a teacher’s written record of a Level 4 speaking performance is shown below. This record suggests that the student’s performance was complete and organised, and the student showed a good, consistent sense of audience.

Content: Level 4
Performance: Level 4

Teachers assigned a rating of Level 4 to approximately 17% of Year 3 students’ speaking performances and 32% of Year 5 students’ speaking performances (see pages 277–279).

LEVEL 5 SPEAKING

The highest rating assigned to student speaking was Level 5.

An example of a teacher’s written record of a Level 5 speaking performance is shown below. This record suggests that the student’s performance was well organised, effectively used appropriate language, explored issues in detail, and engaged the audience through language, gesture, and tone.
Teachers assigned a rating of Level 5 to approximately 6–9% of Year 5 students’ speaking performances (see pages 278–279).
Measuring Speaking Achievement

Each student’s performances on the common speaking tasks and classroom speaking presentations were used to construct a measure of that student’s speaking achievement. Measures of speaking achievement were constructed in three steps. First, each student’s ratings (both content and performance) on the two common speaking tasks were combined to provide a measure of the student’s speaking achievement under controlled (test) conditions. Second, the student’s ratings (both content and performance) on the two classroom presentations were combined to provide a measure of the student’s speaking achievement under typical classroom conditions. Third, ratings on all four performances/presentations were combined to produce a ‘combined’ speaking measure for the student.

Figure 3.25 summarises the distributions of Year 3 and Year 5 students’ speaking measures based on their common speaking task performances and on their classroom work. The distributions of speaking measures are shown here as ‘box and whisker’ plots which indicate the levels on the speaking scale achieved by 10%, 20%, 50%, 80% and 90% of students in each Year group. The number inside each box is the median of the distribution.

From Figure 3.25 it can be seen that the distributions of students’ levels of speaking achievement are very similar, whether based on common speaking tasks or classroom work. This finding is different from the result in writing, where students performed better on classroom work than on the common tasks. The reason for this difference is probably that, in speaking, the two sets of speaking performances are completed under similar conditions and may not reflect the influence of drafting, re-drafting and conferencing.

Figure 3.26 shows the distributions of students’ speaking achievement measures based on their two common speaking tasks and two classroom presentations combined. In constructing these combined measures, the common task and classroom work samples were weighted equally.

For the purposes of establishing baseline measures of Year 3 and Year 5 writing achievement against which performances in future English literacy surveys might be compared, the estimated Year 3 and Year 5 population means and standard deviations have been calculated and are reported in Table 3.18. The sampling standard errors of the means are shown. The estimated population means and standard deviations shown here are based on common task speaking only and reflect the decision to report speaking measures on a scale defined by setting the Year 3 mean at 300 and standard deviation at 100. The numbers of students on which these figures are based are shown in the left-hand column.
From Table 3.18 it can be seen that the difference between the average speaking achievement at Year 5 and the average speaking achievement at Year 3 is 75 points on the Survey speaking scale or 0.75 of the standard deviation at Year 3. From Figure 3.26 it can be seen that this growth from Year 3 to Year 5 is considerably less than a full profile level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=3470</td>
<td>300 (± 2)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>375 (± 2)</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principles and Findings
Mapping Literacy Achievement

Figure 3.25 Distributions of students’ estimated speaking achievements

- Presents a well-reasoned account.
- Displays a sense of key issues.
- Presents challenging ideas.
- Effectively uses appropriate language and/or organisational elements appropriate to genre.
- Consistently enhances presentation with relevant detail.
- Gives considered reasons for opinions (generally justifies assertions).
- Begins to engage audience through language, gesture, tone.
- Presents complete and well-organised account (eg well-rounded story including details).
- Attempts to justify assertions (eg ‘It’s a funny show because...’).
- Attempts to generalise about aspects of topic (eg includes synopsis of show, as opposed to retelling one episode).
- Presents a strong point of view (eg about a favourite character).
- Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation), with good presentation of audience.

- Shows some evidence of organisation (presentation may be muddled or incomplete).
- Provides a full account of a character, experience or event, including all key information.
- Justifies opinions with mostly descriptive information (eg ‘Python was a baddie because he scared rabbit out of her hole’).
- Offers arguments, mostly assertions.
- Tells a complete story with a logical plot, building it well.
- Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation), with good presentation of audience (looks around, smiles), but shows little awareness of the audience.

- Tells an account with a recognisable plot.
- Offers one or two comments or opinions with little or no justification.
- Includes the key information.
- Gives a largely incomplete or long and unstructured presentation (some content may be irrelevant).
- Shows basic understanding of speaking task.
- Speaks audibly but with little sense of addressing audience (eg may be little eye contact where culturally appropriate).
- Speaks with little attempt to modulate voice.

- Expresses ideas simply and conveys limited meaning (eg uses and then and repeats words).
- Presents a disjointed or incomplete story (may need prompting).
- Presents some unrelated ideas (may need prompting).
- Shows limited understanding of speaking task (may stray from original intent).
- Shows limited understanding of the need to communicate with an audience.
- Speaks inaudibly at times.

- Has some consistent sense of audience.
- Shows a good, consistent sense of audience (looks around, smiles), but speaks less confidently.
- Shows a good, consistent sense of audience (looks around, smiles), but shows little awareness of the audience.
- Shows limited understanding of the need to communicate with an audience.

Year 3
- 90%
- 80%
- 50%
- 20%
- 10%

Year 5
- 90%
- 80%
- 50%
- 20%
- 10%
FIGURE 3.26 DISTRIBUTIONS OF COMBINED SPEAKING ACHIEVEMENT ESTIMATES
Figures 3.27 to 3.29 show the distributions of students’ estimated speaking achievements for three subgroups of the population: male/female; English/other than English language background; and low, medium and high socio-economic background.

Figure 3.27 shows that Year 3 females are, on average, achieving at a higher level in speaking than Year 3 males. The median estimate for Year 3 females is 301 on the speaking achievement scale and the median estimate for Year 3 males, 267. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median estimated achievement levels are 372 and 341 respectively.

There is no change in the relative speaking achievements of males and females between Year 3 and Year 5: females achieve about 30 points (0.3 of a standard deviation for all students) higher than males at both Year levels.

Figure 3.28 shows that students from English-speaking backgrounds are, on average, achieving at higher levels in speaking than students from homes in which the main language spoken is a language other than English.

The median speaking achievement estimate for Year 3 students from English-speaking backgrounds is 287, and the estimate for students from language backgrounds other than English, 256. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median speaking achievement of students from English-speaking backgrounds is 357, and from language backgrounds other than English, 340. The difference between the median speaking achievements of these two groups of students decreases slightly from Year 3 to Year 5.

Figure 3.29 shows that students of high socio-economic status (SES) at each Year level are, on average, achieving at a higher level in speaking than students of medium SES who, in turn, are achieving at a higher level in speaking than students of low SES. Students in the high SES group are children of parents in upper professional and managerial occupations; students in the medium SES group, children of parents in clerical and skilled manual occupations; and students in the low SES group, children of parents in unskilled manual occupations.

The median speaking achievement of Year 3 students from high socio-economic backgrounds is 319, from medium SES backgrounds, 284; and from low SES backgrounds, 254. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median speaking achievement estimates are 399, 348, and 337 for students from high, medium, and low SES backgrounds.

An interesting feature of Figure 3.29 is the similar achievement of Year 3 students from high SES and Year 5 students from low SES. The median speaking achievement of Year 3 students from high SES is only slightly lower than the median speaking achievement of Year 5 students from low SES.

A second interesting feature is the range of achievements for the Year 5 students from low SES. The least able students (below the 10th percentile) in this group are achieving well below the median speaking achievement of Year 3 students; the most able (above the 90th percentile) are achieving well above the median speaking achievement of high SES Year 5 students.
FIGURE 3.27 DISTRIBUTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS’ ESTIMATED SPEAKING ACHIEVEMENTS
FIGURE 3.28 DISTRIBUTIONS OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND AND OTHER THAN ENGLISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND STUDENTS’ ESTIMATED SPEAKING ACHIEVEMENTS
Presents a well-reasoned account.
Displays a sense of key issues.
Presests challenging ideas.
Effectively uses appropriate language and/or organisational elements appropriate to genre.
Consistently enhances presentation with relevant discussion.
Gives considered reasons for opinions (generally justifies assertions).
 Begins to engage audience through language, gesture, tone.
Presests complete and well-organised account (eg well-rounded story including details).
Attempts to justify assertions (eg ‘It’s a funny show because of the way... ’).
Attempts to generalise about aspects of topic (eg offers a synopsis of show, and/or to retelling one episode).
Presests a strong point of view (eg about a favourite character).
Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation), with good natural expression.
 Has a good, consistent sense of audience.

Shows some evidence of organisation (presentation may be repetitive or incomplete).
Gives a full account of a character, experience or event including all key information.
Justifies opinions with mostly descriptive information (eg ‘Python was a baddie because he scared rabbit out of her hole’).
Offers a few arguments, mostly assertions.
Tells a compre ted story with a logical plot but lacking detail and elaboration.
Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation) with little awareness of audience.

Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation) with a good, consistent sense of audience (looks around, smiles) but speaks less confidently.

Shows a good, consistent sense of audience (looks around, smiles) but speaks less confidently.

Speaks slightly above average with limited awareness of audience.

Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation) but shows limited understanding of the need to communicate with an audience.

Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation) but shows limited understanding of the need to communicate with an audience.

Speaks with little attempt to modulate voice.

Expresses ideas simply and conveys limited meaning (eg uses and then and repeats words).
Presests a disjointed or incomplete story (may need prompting).
Presests some unrelated ideas (may need prompting).
Shows limited understanding of speaking task (may stray from original intent).
Shows limited understanding of the need to communicate with an audience.
Speaks inaudibly at times.

Figure 3.29 Distributions of high, medium and low socio-economic status students’ estimated speaking achievements.
**Special Indigenous Sample**

Students in the Special Indigenous Sample also completed the Survey speaking tasks. The performances of these students were used to estimate their levels of achievement on the speaking scale.

For each student participating in the Survey, an on-balance estimate of the student’s level of achievement on the speaking scale was made from that student’s performances on the two common speaking tasks. A second estimate for each student was made from the student’s performances of the two best work speaking samples. Figure 3.30 shows the distributions of these two sets of estimates for both Year 3 and Year 5 students.

In interpreting the speaking performances of the Special Indigenous Sample, it must be remembered that this was not a representative sample of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 3 and 5, but a sample of students in schools reporting five or more Indigenous students at both Year 3 and Year 5.

Figure 3.30 shows that most Year 3 students in the Special Indigenous Sample are estimated to be working in profile Levels 1 and 2 in speaking; and most Year 5 students, in profile Levels 2 and 3. There is a greater spread of speaking achievements in the Special Indigenous Sample at both Years 3 and 5 than in the main sample.

An interesting feature of Figure 3.30 is the difference between the performances of the lower achieving students on common task and best work speaking. In general, students in the Special Indigenous Sample perform better on classroom speaking tasks than on the common tasks developed for the Survey. Lower-achieving students, in particular, perform better on classroom-based work. One explanation may be that the speaking common tasks used in the Survey, despite their careful selection, were beyond the experiences of many students in the Special Indigenous Sample.

The mean and standard deviation of Special Indigenous Sample students’ estimated levels of achievement on the speaking scale based on their common task performances are shown in Table 3.19. Notice that the large sampling error on the mean is the result of the relatively small number of students (left-hand column) in this sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>173 (± 7)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=308</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>274 (± 7)</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=261</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.19 Special Indigenous Sample students’ Speaking means and standard deviations
FIGURE 3.30 DISTRIBUTIONS OF ESTIMATED SPEAKING ACHIEVEMENTS FOR THE SPECIAL INDIGENOUS SAMPLE
Because the common speaking tasks and classroom best work samples in speaking were designed to provide information about the outcomes of the English profile for Australian schools, and because the content and performance indicators on the Survey speaking scale are based directly on these outcomes, it has been possible to ‘map’ the levels of the English profile on to the Survey speaking scale (as shown in Figure 3.24). Level 1 on the Survey scale corresponds to profile Level 1; Level 2, to profile Level 2; and so on.

This direct mapping of profile levels on to the speaking scale has made it possible to estimate the percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students working in each profile level based on students’ common task speaking and also on their classroom best work samples. These percentages are shown in Tables 3.20 and 3.21.

### Table 3.20 Percentage of Year 3 students working in each profile level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Tasks</th>
<th>Best Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.21 Percentage of Year 5 students working in each profile level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Tasks</th>
<th>Best Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To make these estimates, it was necessary to decide what it meant for a student to be ‘working in’ a profile level. The rule applied here was a 50% rule. For example, a student whose common task speaking assessments were 2, 2, 3, 3 was considered to be ‘working in’ Level 3 because at least 50% of that student’s assessments were at Level 3. (A student with the assessments 1, 2, 3, 4 would also have been considered, on balance, to be working in Level 3 because they achieved the same speaking score, 10, as a student with assessments 2, 2, 3, 3.)
The percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students in the Special Indigenous Sample working at each profile level in speaking are shown in Tables 3.22 and 3.23.

**Table 3.22 Percentage of Year 3 Special Indigenous Sample students working in each profile level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Common Tasks</th>
<th>Best Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.23 Percentage of Year 5 Special Indigenous Sample students working in each profile level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Common Tasks</th>
<th>Best Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or below</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 1996 National School English Literacy Survey included an assessment of the listening achievements of Year 3 and Year 5 students.

**What Was Assessed?**

In assessing levels of listening achievement, special attention was paid to:

- students’ abilities to listen effectively as required by the formal school environment;
- students’ abilities to understand and explain the main themes, ideas and points of view expressed in spoken texts; and
- students’ awareness of the relationship between the medium and the message in spoken text.

Within this broad framework, listening assessment tasks were developed with reference to the outcomes of the English profile. Assessment procedures were designed to address a range of relevant profile outcomes in listening (see pages 256 and 258–259).

**How Was Listening Assessed? – The Common Tasks**

Students’ levels of listening achievement were assessed by asking them to listen to a selection of spoken texts on audio tape and to answer a series of questions. At Year 3 students also were asked to respond to a series of directions by drawing on a provided plan. Classroom teachers then read and made judgements about the quality of their students’ responses using provided guides to the assessment of student work.

The texts to which students listened included a discussion, an interview, and a series of directions at Year 3, and rap advertisements and an interview at Year 5. Students were asked to:

- retrieve information (Year 3 and Year 5); and
- follow directions (Year 3).

Year 3 students completed a total of 22 listening tasks; Year 5 students completed 15. These tasks required students to:

- form initial understandings of text, including
- retrieve information
  
  eg  This is a description of a day on location. Tick the things Marzena does before breakfast. When was it safe for Aunty Iris to go swimming?

- reflect on themes, ideas and points of view expressed in text
  
  eg  Do you think Aunty Iris and her friends believed in the Bunyip? Explain your answer. Grandma is talking in one advertisement and Grandpa is talking in the other. What is the other main difference between the two advertisements?

- reflect on the ways in which people interact when listening and speaking (Year 3)
  
  eg  What is different about the way the children speak when the teacher is with them?
follow directions (Year 3)
  eg Draw a pile of shells in the middle of the set design plan.
reflect on the construction of text, including elements of the script writer’s craft (Year 5)
  eg Do you think it was a good idea to use children to make these ads? Explain your answer.
  What sound effects are used in the Grandpa ad to create the mood?

The Listening Scale

Students’ performances on the Survey tasks were used to construct a scale of increasing achievement in listening. This scale is shown in Figure 3.31.

The listening scale is empirically based: in other words, it is based on an analysis of observed student performances in the Survey. The listening indicators in Figure 3.31 are derived from some, but not all, of the Survey tasks.

The indicator lowest on the scale,
  identifies key information in a brief spoken text
describes the easiest listening task in the Survey. This task, given only to Year 3 students, asks students to recall an important response by an interviewee. This was the listening task most often completed correctly, placing it lower on the listening scale than all other indicators.

The indicator at the top of Figure 3.31,
  interprets aspects of content and register to distinguish between speakers
describes the most difficult listening task in the Survey. This task, given only to Year 5 students, assesses understandings of linguistic features by asking students to reflect on a speaker’s style.

Each indicator in Figure 3.31 is located on the scale according to the level of difficulty students experienced in completing that task.

On the right of Figure 3.31 an attempt has been made to show the approximate relationship between these indicators and the Listening levels of the English profile.

There were no tasks developed to address Level 1 of the English profile, which emphasises informal listening interaction.

At about Level 2, students listen attentively for a purpose, including identifying, selecting and recording essential information, and following instructions to complete simple drawings.

At about Level 3, students listen for, and reflect on, specific information, including offering opinions about texts they hear, and reflecting on the ways in which people express themselves.

At about Level 4, students listen and respond constructively and monitor the communication patterns of themselves and others, including justifying their opinions about texts they hear, and asking for relevant additional information.

At about Level 5, students listen and respond to a range of sustained material involving challenging ideas and issues, including reflecting on the details of text, and the effect a speaker may have on an audience.
Interprets aspects of content and register to distinguish between speakers.
Recognises a particular target audience in advertising.
Recognises, from different perspectives, the effect a speaker may have on an audience.
Recalls peripheral related details in a sustained spoken text.
Offers and justifies an opinion about spoken text (eg an advertisement).
Identifies several sound effects used to create a mood.
Interprets speaker’s manner (eg refers to aspects of content and tone).

Identifies the focus of an interview and generates relevant additional questions.
Generates a question based on, and going beyond, a spoken text.
Finds evidence to support a conclusion.

Recognises a speaker’s manner (eg confident, shy).
Identifies some features distinguishing formal from informal speech.
Recognises that speakers are chosen to have an effect on audience.
Selects from competing instructions to complete simple drawings.
Identifies how speaking is adjusted in different situations.
Infers a speaker’s point of view (predicts their likely response).
Recalls details of a spoken text.
Offers an opinion about spoken text (eg evaluates an advertisement).
Listens to other speakers and reflects on their presentations.

Recognises a character’s feelings or opinion in spoken text.
Follows spoken instructions to complete simple drawings.
Selects and records essential information.

Identifies key information in a brief spoken text.

Figure 3.31 Some indicators on the Listening Scale
The Listening Scale — Examples

Figure 3.32 shows all Survey tasks calibrated on the listening scale. The tasks most often answered correctly are at the bottom of the figure; the tasks least often answered correctly are at the top. Some tasks (eg task 11 in Year 5) were in two parts and the difficulties of the two parts are shown separately (11.1 and 11.2).

It can be seen from this picture that the tasks given to Year 3 students tended to be easier than the tasks given to Year 5 students. (The ‘equating’ procedure used to position Year 3 and Year 5 listening tasks on the same scale is described on page 295.) Most tasks at Year 3 address outcomes from Levels 2 and 3 of the English profile; most tasks at Year 5 address outcomes from Levels 3 and 4. Within this full set of common tasks, ten tasks have been highlighted (white on black) for closer consideration.

Level 2 Listening

A number of listening tasks given to Year 3 students address outcomes from Level 2 of the profile. These tasks tend to calibrate below 200 on the scale. Three examples are shown below.

Tasks 3 and 5 ask students to identify key information in a brief spoken text. These tasks were written to address the ‘texts’ substrand of the profile. This substrand deals with what students can do with different kinds of spoken texts. Level 2 of the profile also focuses on the ways in which students interact in structured and spontaneous school situations.

Task 19 requires students to follow spoken instructions to complete a simple drawing. This task was written to address the ‘strategies’ outcome: Speaks and listens in ways that assist communication with others.

| Task 3 | answered correctly by 88% of Year 3 students  
|--------|--------------------------------------------------|
|        | ‘Peter thinks that folktales are not for babies.  
|        | Peter thinks this because.....’                |
| Task 5 | answered correctly by 90% of Year 3 students  
|        | ‘Aunty Iris said, “The Bunyip would get you”.  
|        | What did she think the bunyip would do?’        |
| Task 19| answered correctly by 82% of Year 3 students   
|        | ‘Draw 8 small legs on the crab. Just use lines for the legs, 4 on each side.’ |

Other tasks in this region of the listening scale assess the ability to select and record essential information and to recognise a character’s feelings or opinion in spoken text.

Tasks in this range were given to Year 3 students only, more than 85% of whom were able to complete tasks of this kind correctly.
Figure 3.32 Common tasks calibrated on the survey listening scale.
LEVEL 3 LISTENING

A large number of Survey tasks in listening address outcomes from Level 3 of the English profile. These tasks tend to calibrate in the range 200 to 375 on the listening scale. Three examples are shown below.

Task 4 asks students to listen to other speakers and to reflect on their presentations. This task was written to address the ‘strategies’ outcome: *Reflects on own approach to communication and the ways in which others interact.*

Task 2 assesses the ability to identify some features distinguishing formal from informal speech. To complete Task 8.1 students need to recognise that speakers are chosen to have an effect on an audience. These three tasks were developed to address the ‘contextual understanding’ outcome: *Recognises that certain types of spoken texts are associated with particular contexts and purposes.*

Other listening tasks in this region of the listening scale assess the ability to offer an opinion about spoken text (eg evaluate an advertisement); to recall details of a spoken text; to infer a speaker’s point of view (predict their likely response); to identify how speaking is adjusted in different situations; to select from competing instructions to complete simple drawings; to recognise a speaker’s manner (eg confident or shy); and to find evidence to support a conclusion.

Tasks in this range were given to both Year 3 and Year 5 students. Between 40% and 75% of Year 3 students, and 55% to 85% of Year 5 students were able to complete tasks of this kind.

LEVEL 4 LISTENING

A number of Survey tasks in listening addressed outcomes from Level 4 of the English profile. These tasks tend to calibrate in the range 375 to 500 on the listening scale. Two examples are shown on page 175.
Task 9 asks students to generate a question based on, and going beyond, a spoken text. This task was written to address the ‘strategies’ outcome: Assists and monitors the communication patterns of self and others.

In Task 2 students identify several sound effects used to create a mood. This task addresses the ‘linguistic structures and features’ outcome: Controls most linguistic structures and features of spoken language for interpreting meaning and developing and presenting ideas and information in familiar situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Answered correctly by</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task 9</td>
<td>34% of Year 3 students</td>
<td>‘What question would you like to ask Aunty Iris to find out more about the Bunyip?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 2</td>
<td>31% of Year 5 students</td>
<td>‘What sound effects are used in the GRANDPA ad to create the mood?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other tasks in this region of the listening scale assess the ability to identify the focus of an interview and generate relevant additional questions; to interpret a speaker’s manner by referring to aspects of content and tone; and to offer and justify an opinion about a spoken text (eg an advertisement).

Level 4 tasks were given to both Year 3 and Year 5 students. Fewer than 40% of Year 3 students and between 25% and 55% of Year 5 students were able to complete tasks of this kind.

**LEVEL 5 LISTENING**

Some Survey tasks in listening addressed outcomes from Level 5 of the English profile. These were the most difficult tasks in the Survey (above about 500 on the listening scale). Two examples are shown on page 176.

Task 6.2 assesses the ability to recognise a particular target audience in advertising. This task was written to address the ‘contextual understanding’ outcome: Identifies the effect of context, audience and purpose on spoken texts.

Task 14 assesses the ability to interpret aspects of content and register in order to distinguish between speakers. This task addresses the ‘linguistic structures and features’ outcome: Discusses and experiments with some linguistic structures and features that enable speakers to influence audiences.
Task 6.2
answered correctly by 17% of Year 5 students
‘The RAP-AD was made in rap style. Why do you think it was made in this style?’

Task 14
answered correctly by 17% of Year 5 students
‘Here are some comments taken from the interview. Tick the sentences Marzena said.

“'I’ll just give you, like, the day.”
“'It’s a pretty gross time.”
“'We’ve talked about all the glum things.”
“On that high note, we might leave it.”
“'It’s a really good part, blah, blah, blah.”’

Other tasks in this range assess the ability to recall peripheral, related details in a sustained spoken text; and to recognise, from different perspectives, the effect a speaker may have on an audience.

Level 5 tasks were given to Year 5 students only. Fewer than 25% of students were able to complete tasks of this kind.
MEASURING LISTENING ACHIEVEMENT

Each student’s performances on the listening common tasks have been used to construct a measure of that student’s listening achievement: in other words, to estimate that student’s level of attainment on the Survey listening scale.

Figure 3.33 summarises the distributions of Year 3 and Year 5 students’ listening measures. The distributions of listening measures are shown here as ‘box and whisker’ plots which indicate the levels on the listening scale achieved by 10%, 20%, 50%, 80% and 90% of students in each Year group. The number inside each box is the median of the distribution.

For the purposes of establishing baseline measures of Year 3 and Year 5 listening achievement against which performances in future English literacy surveys might be compared, the estimated Year 3 and Year 5 population means and standard deviations have been calculated and are reported in Table 3.24. The sampling standard errors of the means are shown. The estimated population means and standard deviations shown here reflect the decision to report listening measures on a scale defined by setting the Year 3 mean at 300 and standard deviation at 100. The numbers of students on which these figures are based are shown in the left-hand column.

Table 3.24 Listening means and standard deviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>300 (± 2)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>390 (± 2)</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.24 shows that the difference between the average listening achievement at Year 5 and the average listening achievement at Year 3 is 90 points on the listening scale, or 0.90 of the standard deviation at Year 3. From Figure 3.33 it can be seen that this growth from Year 3 to Year 5 is less than a full profile level.
FIGURE 3.33 DISTRIBUTIONS OF STUDENTS’ ESTIMATED LISTENING ACHIEVEMENTS

Principles and Findings
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Interprets aspects of content and register to distinguish between speakers.
Recognises a particular target audience in advertising.
Recognises, from different perspectives, the effect a speaker may have on an audience.
Recalls peripheral related details in a sustained spoken text.
Offers and justifies an opinion about spoken text (eg an advertisement).
Identifies several sound effects used to create a mood.
Interprets speaker’s manner (eg refers to aspects of content and tone).

Identifies the focus of an interview and generates relevant additional questions.
Generates a question based on, and goes beyond, a spoken text.
Finds evidence to support a conclusion.
Recognises a character’s feelings or opinion in spoken text.
Follows spoken instructions to complete simple drawings.
Selects and records essential information.

Year 5
Year 3

Figure 3.33 Distributions of students’ estimated listening achievements
Figures 3.34 to 3.36 show the distributions of students’ estimated listening achievements for three subgroups of the population: male/female; English/language other than English background; and low, medium and high socio-economic background.

Figure 3.34 shows that Year 3 females are, on average, achieving at a higher level in listening than Year 3 males. The median estimate for Year 3 females is 309 on the listening achievement scale and the median estimate for Year 3 males, 281. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median estimated achievement levels are 404 and 373 respectively.

There is no significant change in the relative listening achievements of males and females between Year 3 and Year 5: females achieve about 29 points (0.29 of a standard deviation for all students) higher than males at both Year levels.

Figure 3.35 shows that students from English-speaking backgrounds are, on average, achieving at a higher level in listening than students from homes in which the main language spoken is a language other than English.

The median listening achievement estimate for Year 3 students from English-speaking background is 298, and the estimate for students from language backgrounds other than English, 242. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median listening achievement of students from English-speaking backgrounds is 390, and of students from language backgrounds other than English, 352.

At both Year levels there is a greater spread in the scores of English-background students than of students from backgrounds other than English.

Figure 3.36 shows that students of high socio-economic status (SES) are, on average, at each Year level, achieving at a higher level in listening than students of medium SES who, in turn, are achieving at a higher level in writing than students of low SES. Students in the high SES group are children of parents in upper professional and managerial occupations; students in the medium SES group, children of parents in clerical and skilled manual occupations; and students in the low SES group, children of parents in unskilled manual occupations.

The median listening achievement of Year 3 students from high socio-economic backgrounds is 328, from medium SES backgrounds, 289; and from low SES backgrounds, 257. This pattern is repeated at Year 5, where the median listening achievement estimates are 432, 380, and 338 for students from high, medium, and low SES backgrounds.

An interesting feature of Figure 3.36 is the achievement of Year 3 students of high SES compared with Year 5 students’ achievements. These Year 3 students are, on average, achieving only slightly below the average achievement of Year 5 students of low SES. The most able students from this group (90th percentile) are achieving at a higher level than most Year 5 students of medium SES.

Another interesting feature is the spread of achievement of Year 5 students of low SES. The least able of these students (below the 10th percentile) are achieving well below the median for Year 3 low SES students; the most able (above the 90th percentile) are achieving above the median for Year 5 high SES students.
Interprets aspects of content and register to distinguish between speakers.
Recognises a particular target audience in advertising.
Recognises, from different perspectives, the effect a speaker may have on an audience.
Recalls peripheral related details in a sustained spoken text.
Offers and justifies an opinion about spoken text (eg an advertisement).
Identifies several sound effects used to create a mood.
Interprets speaker’s manner (eg refers to aspects of content and tone).
Identifies the focus of an interview and generates relevant additional questions.
Generates a question based on, and going beyond a spoken text.
Finds evidence to support a conclusion.
Recognises a speaker’s manner (eg confident, shy).
Identifies some features distinguishing formal from informal speech.
Recognises that speakers are chosen to have an effect on audience.
Selects from competing instructions to complete simple drawings.
Identifies how speaking is adjusted in different situations.
Infers a speaker’s point of view (predicts their likely response).
Recalls details of a spoken text.
Offers an opinion about spoken text (eg evaluates an advertisement).
Listens to other speakers and reflects on their presentations.
Recognises a character’s feelings or opinion in spoken text.
Follows spoken instructions to complete simple drawings.
Selects and records essential information.
Identifies key information in a brief spoken text.

**Figure 3.34 Distributions of male and female students’ estimated listening achievements**
FIGURE 3.35 DISTRIBUTIONS OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND AND OTHER THAN ENGLISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND STUDENTS’ ESTIMATED LISTENING ACHIEVEMENTS

Year 5

English

Other than English

Year 3

English

Other than English

Year 3

English

Other than English

Level 5

Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

Listening Achievement

Recognises a speaker’s manner (eg confident, shy).
Recognises that speakers are chosen to have an effect on audience.
Selects from competing instructions to complete simple drawings.
Identifies how speaking is adjusted in different situations.
Infers a speaker’s point of view (predicts their likely response).
Recalls details of a spoken text.
Offers an opinion about spoken text (eg evaluates an advertisement).
Listens to other speakers and reflects on their presentations.
Recognises a character’s feelings or opinion in spoken text.
Identifies key information in a brief spoken text.
Identifies some features distinguishing formal from informal speech.
Recognises that speakers are chosen to have an effect on audience.
Selects from competing instructions to complete simple drawings.
Identifies how speaking is adjusted in different situations.
Infers a speaker’s point of view (predicts their likely response).
Recalls details of a spoken text.
Offers an opinion about spoken text (eg evaluates an advertisement).
Listens to other speakers and reflects on their presentations.
Recognises a character’s feelings or opinion in spoken text.
Identifies key information in a brief spoken text.
Identifies some features distinguishing formal from informal speech.
Recognises that speakers are chosen to have an effect on audience.
Selects from competing instructions to complete simple drawings.
Identifies how speaking is adjusted in different situations.
Infers a speaker’s point of view (predicts their likely response).
Recalls details of a spoken text.
Offers an opinion about spoken text (eg evaluates an advertisement).
Listens to other speakers and reflects on their presentations.
Recognises a character’s feelings or opinion in spoken text.
Identifies key information in a brief spoken text.
Fig. 3.36 Distributions of low, medium, and high socio-economic status students' estimated listening achievements.

- **Level 2**: Identifies key information in a brief spoken text.
- **Level 3**: Recognises a character's feelings or opinions in spoken text.
- **Level 4**: Identifies the focus of an interview and generates relevant additional questions.
- **Level 5**: Infers a speaker's point of view (predicts their likely response).

- **Low**: Year 3 - 257, Year 5 - 338, 432
- **Medium**: Year 3 - 289, 328, 380
- **High**: Year 3 - 328, 380, 432

Listening Achievement

10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%
Students in the Special Indigenous Sample also completed the Survey listening tasks. The performances of these students were used to estimate their levels of achievement on the listening scale.

In interpreting the listening performances of the Special Indigenous Sample, it must be remembered that this was not a representative sample of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 3 and 5, but a sample of students in schools reporting five or more Indigenous students at both Year 3 and Year 5.

Figure 3.37 shows that most Year 3 Special Indigenous Sample students are estimated to be working within profile Level 2 and lower Level 3 in listening. There is a greater spread of listening achievement in the Special Indigenous Sample than in the main national sample (the standard deviation is 28% greater than in the main sample).

Most Year 5 students in the Special Indigenous Samples are estimated to be working in profile Levels 2 and 3. 20% of students are estimated to be working above profile level 3. There is an even greater spread of listening achievements in Year 5 than in Year 3.

An interesting feature of Figure 3.37 is the difference between the 90th percentile at Year 3 and the 90th percentile at Year 5. As with reading, there appears to be considerable growth of the best listeners between Year 3 and Year 5, perhaps because many of these students are mastering English as a second language. On the other hand, as for reading, the bottom 20% of listeners appear to make very little progress between Year 3 and Year 5. These students have very low levels of listening ability.

The mean and standard deviation of Special Indigenous Sample students’ estimated levels of listening achievement are shown in Table 3.25. Notice that the large sampling error on the mean is the result of the relatively small number of students (left-hand column) in this sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Mean (error)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=317</td>
<td>149 (± 7)</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>238 (± 7)</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.25 Special Indigenous Sample students’ listening means and standard deviations
Year 5

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

Principles and Findings
Mapping Literacy Achievement

Figure 3.37 Distributions of estimated listening achievements for the special indigenous sample
Percentages Working in Profile Levels

Because the listening tasks used in the Survey were designed to provide information about listening outcomes in the English profile for Australian schools, and because the indicators on the Survey listening scale describe these tasks, it has been possible to ‘map’ the levels of the English profile on to the Survey listening scale (as shown in Figure 3.31).

The mapping of profile levels on to the listening scale has made it possible to estimate the percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students working in each profile level, based on their performances on the common tasks. These percentages are shown in Table 3.26.

To make these estimates it was necessary to decide what it meant for a student to be ‘working in’ a profile level. A student was judged to be ‘working in’ a level if they were likely to succeed on 50% of at least the easiest listening tasks from that level. (This method recognises a range of listening achievements within each level. The lowest achieving students working within a level are likely to succeed on 50% of the easiest items from that level; the highest achieving students working within the same level are likely to succeed on 50% of the most difficult items from that level.)

The percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 students in the Special Indigenous Sample working in each level are shown in Table 3.27.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 and below</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.26 Percentage of students working in each profile level

Table 3.27 Percentage of Special Indigenous Sample students working in each profile level
Comparing Achievements Across Literacy Strands

For the purposes of the National School English Literacy Survey, a decision was made to assess the five aspects of literacy—writing, reading, viewing, speaking, and listening—separately, to construct a reporting scale for each aspect, and to investigate the relationships among these five aspects.

In the English profile for Australian schools, these five aspects are clustered into three ‘strands’: writing; reading and viewing; and speaking and listening. In the 1995 trial for the Survey, there was strong evidence that reading and viewing could be combined into a single literacy measure, but there was equally clear evidence that speaking and listening function as different aspects of literacy and should not be combined into a single measure. On the basis of the 1995 trial results, a decision was made to assess and report all five aspects separately.

Estimates of the correlations between the five underlying literacy dimensions, based on the 1996 Survey data, are shown in Tables 3.28 and 3.29. These tables show that the correlations between the three ‘receptive’ literacy modes, reading, viewing, and listening, are uniformly high (0.85 to 0.91). The correlation between writing and these three receptive modes is moderate (0.68 to 0.79). The correlation between speaking and writing is low (0.64 to 0.68), and the correlation between speaking and the three receptive modes is lower still (0.56 to 0.63).

On the basis of these correlations, there is again a strong case for keeping speaking and listening separate when assessing and reporting students’ literacy achievements. A strong case also could be made on the basis of these data for combining reading and viewing assessments. In fact, the high correlations between reading, viewing, and listening suggest that all three of these aspects could be combined into a single measure. It should be noted, however, that these three aspects were assessed in similar ways (using paper and pen tests), and that there may be good substantive reasons for continuing to assess and report these three receptive modes separately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.28 Correlations between latent variables for Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliabilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students’ achievements in the two ‘expressive’ literacy modes (writing and speaking) were assessed by two different assessment methods: through students’ performances on a set of ‘common tasks’ developed for the Survey, and through a collection of classroom ‘best work’ assembled in provided categories.

Several observations about these two assessment methods have been made through the Survey. In speaking, common tasks and classroom best work samples provide very similar indications of students’ levels of speaking achievement. The reason for this may be that the common tasks and classroom samples are based on similar activities. In both assessments students are judged on the basis of spoken performances or presentations in classroom settings. Whether the context for assessment is set by the teacher or through externally specified speaking tasks appears to make no significant difference to the resulting assessments for students in the main sample.

In writing, students’ performances on the common tasks and classroom best work samples reflect different levels of writing competence. Again, this observation is understandable in terms of the conditions under which the samples of student writing were produced. The common writing tasks provide an indication of students’ writing abilities under common conditions (ie working alone without peer or teacher support, without extensive drafting and re-drafting). The classroom work samples, on the other hand, have been produced under typical classroom support conditions with opportunities for students to conference their writing, to draft, re-draft, and polish their work.

An interesting observation is that students with lower levels of writing achievement appear to benefit most (in the sense that their writing shows greatest improvement) as a result of typical classroom support for student writing.

**Table 3.29 Correlations between latent variables for Year 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Viewing</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td></td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliabilities</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of Common Task and Best Work Performances
Comparing Subgroup Performances

The literacy achievements of major subgroups of the student population have been investigated in this chapter. Subgroup performances on the common tasks are brought together here in summary form to facilitate comparison (Figures 3.38–3.42).

A comparison of the medians for males and females shows that the gender difference is larger for the expressive modes (writing and speaking) than for the receptive modes (reading, viewing, listening). The greatest gender difference occurs for writing; the least for viewing. The size of the gender difference does not change significantly from Year 3 to Year 5.

A comparison of the medians for the three socio-economic groups shows that, in reading, least growth from Year 3 to Year 5 occurs for the children of unskilled manual workers, and most growth for children of professional and managerial parents, resulting in a widening of the reading achievement gap between high and low socio-economic groups. The same trend occurs in listening.

In writing and speaking, children of clerical/skilled manual parents do not make the same progress between Year 3 and Year 5 as students from other socio-economic groups, meaning that there is some tendency for the gap between these students and students of professional and managerial parents to widen between Year 3 and Year 5.

A comparison of the median for students from language backgrounds other than English with the median for all students shows some tendency for students from language backgrounds other than English to perform less well in the receptive modes (particularly listening) than in the expressive modes (particularly writing).
Figure 3.38 Median writing achievements of various subgroups of the student population.
Figure 3.39 Median reading achievements of various subgroups of the student population.
Figure 3.40 Median viewing achievements of various subgroups of the student population.
Figure 3.41 Median speaking achievements of various subgroups of the student population.
Figure 3.42 Median listening achievements of various subgroups of the student population.
Comparing Growth from Year 3 to Year 5

Main Sample

Figure 3.43 shows the distributions of Year 3 and Year 5 students’ estimated achievements in reading, viewing, listening, speaking, and writing based on their common task performances. The achievement scale has been defined by setting the 1996 Year 3 mean (shown as a dotted line) and standard deviation at 300 and 100 respectively on each literacy dimension. The medians are shown in the body of the picture, and the differences between the median performances of Year 3 and Year 5 students, at the bottom of the picture.

From Figure 3.43 it can be seen that growth between Year 3 and Year 5 (labelled $\Delta$) is uneven across the literacy dimensions. Greatest growth (93 points on the achievement scale) occurs in listening; least growth (72 points) occurs in speaking. The large gap between the weakest and most able students is maintained between Year 3 and Year 5 on each dimension.

An interesting feature of Figure 3.43 is the more rapid growth made in the receptive areas of literacy (reading, viewing and listening) than in the expressive areas (speaking and writing).

By halving the estimated growth ($\Delta$) from Year 3 to Year 5, an estimate is obtained of the ‘average’ annual growth in literacy at this stage of schooling. The difference between the literacy achievements of the top 10% and bottom 10% of students in each Year level is about five times this average annual growth.
**Special Indigenous Sample**

Figure 3.44 shows the distributions of estimated achievements in reading, viewing, listening, speaking, and writing for the Special Indigenous Sample, based on their common task performances. Estimates are expressed on the same scale as estimates for the Main Sample (see Figure 3.43).

Care must be taken in interpreting the achievements of this sample of students. The Special Indigenous Sample was not a nationally representative sample of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 3 and 5, but a sample of students in schools reporting at least five Indigenous students at each of these Year levels.

From Figure 3.44 it can be seen that growth between Year 3 and Year 5 for the Special Indigenous Sample also is uneven across the literacy dimensions. The greatest growth (101 points on the achievement scale) occurs in speaking; the least growth (65 points) occurs in writing.

A significant feature of Figure 3.44 is the increase in the gap between the highest and lowest achievers between Years 3 and 5 in almost all aspects of literacy. It appears that the lowest achieving Special Indigenous Sample students make very little progress in literacy over these two years of school.
Figure 3.44 Distributions of Year 3 and Year 5 Special Indigenous Sample Students' Literacy Achievements
A considerable range in the literacy achievements of students in Years 3 and 5 was observed in the data. To investigate some of the factors associated with differences in achievement, a series of analyses was designed and conducted.

These analyses explored the relationship between literacy achievements and student background factors such as socio-economic background, language background and gender; teacher and school characteristics such as use of a library and computers; and student activities such as the frequency of reading books at home or doing homework. The analyses also investigated the extent to which variations in individual student achievement reflected average differences between schools.

Some of the analyses made use of the separate achievement measures on each strand, but other analyses made use of a global literacy measure for each student. This was because the relationships between students’ achievement levels and the background variables were very similar for the literacy measures for each of the five strands. Consequently, the five measures were combined to form a global ‘literacy’ measure, for each student, which was used in both the multilevel analysis and the analysis of sources of variation.

The first set of analyses investigated the association between student background, as well as school differences, and global achievement in literacy. Overall these analyses showed:

- approximately 38% of the variation in individual achievement was associated with average differences among schools.

Average difference among schools include a small contribution (about 10%) that arises from school differences in student background (gender, socio-economic and other than English-speaking background) as well as other differences among schools. The total contribution arising from differences among schools was larger than is typically reported and could reflect the school-based nature of the assessment procedures.

- Student background contributed about 14% of the variation in achievement.

The contribution of student background to achievement was made up partly from differences between schools in the background of their students and partly from differences in the backgrounds of individual students. Some 10% was associated with school differences in these factors and 4% was associated with individual student background.

- A large amount of the variation in students’ achievements (52%) was not associated with either the school attended or these aspects of student background.

The reason that these percentages add to more than 100 is that some of the variation arises from overlapping sources.

The contribution arising from individual differences in factors other than school attended and the identified aspects of student background indicates the scope for investigations of achievements in literacy.

4.1 Factors Associated with Achievement

A series of analyses was undertaken to identify in greater detail school and student characteristics associated with literacy achievement. The first step was to examine the correlations between achievement measures in writing, reading, viewing, speaking and listening and a range of student and school or teacher variables. The second step was to include both student and school or teacher variables in a two-level analysis.
STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The student information sheet (completed by teachers) and the student questionnaire (completed by the students themselves) provided a wide range of information about the students who participated in the Survey (see pages 297–298). From this information a number of variables were developed. The strength of the associations between these variables and achievements in literacy was estimated by correlation coefficients. These coefficients were calculated separately for each strand and separately for Year 3 and Year 5. Correlation coefficients can range from 0 (no association) to 1 (perfect correspondence between the two variables).

As the samples were fairly large, even small correlation coefficients were statistically significant and so attention was focused on those of larger magnitude. A guiding rule in these circumstances is to give attention to those coefficients that are greater than 0.1 and therefore associated with at least 1% of the variation in achievement. Some of the larger correlation coefficients representing the association between student variables and achievement measures are shown in Table 4.1.

STUDENT BACKGROUND

In terms of student background it can be seen that gender, parents’ occupational status and other than English-speaking background were associated with achievement.

• Gender. The positive correlation coefficients between gender (girl rather than boy) and literacy achievements reflect the fact that girls performed better than boys on all strands and at both Year levels. These coefficients correspond to a mean difference between girls and boys across all the strands in average scores of approximately 0.3 standard deviation units. At each Year level there were differences between the strands: the largest differences were observed for writing (approximately 0.4 standard deviations) and the smallest differences were observed for viewing (approximately 0.2 standard deviations). The associations between gender and literacy achievements were similar at Year 3 and Year 5.

• Socio-economic Background. Parents’ occupational status is often taken as an indication of student socio-economic background. The relationship between the two measures of occupational status (fathers’ and mothers’) and literacy achievements were positive indicating that those from higher status backgrounds had higher levels of achievement. There was no appreciable difference between the size of the correlation coefficients for fathers’ and mothers’ occupations (even though there was a greater amount of missing data for the latter) and there was no appreciable difference between Year levels. The size of the association between parents’ occupational status and achievement is typical of the values reported in the research literature but it is of interest that the association is equally strong at Year 3 and Year 5.

• Other than English-speaking Background. Two of the variables in Table 4.1 provide indications of other than English-speaking background. Firstly, the number of years in Australia was positively associated with achievements in literacy, with the average value of the correlation coefficient being 0.2. Secondly, the frequency of speaking English at home was positively associated with achievements in literacy, with the average value of the correlation coefficient being 0.1.
### Table 4.1 Correlations between literacy achievement measures and student background variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Viewing</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Viewing</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often read books at home?</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often read newspapers?</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often watch TV (weekdays)</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often talk about world?</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often use computer to write?</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do homework?</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help with homework?</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much like telling things?</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl rather than boy?</td>
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<td>.11</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often speak English at home?</td>
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<td>.09</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father’s occupation?</td>
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<td>.29</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STUDENT LITERACY-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Table 4.1 also records the larger correlation coefficients between variables representing students’ activities and dispositions and their achievements in literacy.

- Communication at Home. Two home-based activities reflected general levels of communication at home. The frequency with which students talked to their family about things they were doing at school had an average correlation coefficient of 0.12 with achievements in literacy. The frequency with which students talked about things that were happening in the world outside school or home had an average correlation of 0.11 with achievements in literacy. In neither case was there a difference between strands or Year levels.

- Reading at Home. Two other variables in Table 4.1 represented activities directly concerned with reading. The frequency of reading books at home and the frequency of reading newspapers at home were each associated with achievements in literacy, the average values of the correlation coefficients being 0.19 and 0.10. Within the data there was a suggestion that the relationship might be a little stronger for reading than for most other strands. Although it has not been shown in Table 4.1, there was a tendency for the frequency of reading magazines to be associated with achievements in literacy at Year 5 (the correlation coefficients averaging only 0.07) with an even smaller negative association for the reading of comics (0.05).

- Television. There was a small negative association between the number of hours spent watching television each day during the week and achievements in literacy. At Year 3, the average value of the correlation coefficients was -0.11 and at Year 5 the average of the correlation coefficients was -0.08.

- Homework. Two of the variables in Table 4.1 are concerned with homework. The frequency of doing homework had a modest association with achievements in literacy (the correlation coefficients averaged 0.12) and the extent to which homework was done independently of help had an equally small association with achievements (the correlation coefficients averaged 0.10).

STUDENT ENJOYMENT OF LITERACY ACTIVITIES

Student enjoyment of reading in class was associated with achievement in reading (the correlation coefficients were 0.31 at Year 5 and 0.23 at Year 3) as well as with their achievements in other aspects of literacy to a smaller extent. This suggests a moderate level of association although it does not establish the direction of causation. It could be that enjoyment facilitates the development of reading skills, or it could be that the achievement of competence in reading helps to make that activity more enjoyable.

There was also a moderate association between enjoyment of telling things in class and achievement in speaking (0.19 at Year 5 and 0.15 at Year 3). Student enjoyment of other activities in class such as writing, looking at videos and films, and listening to stories being told were not associated with achievements to any appreciable extent.
School and Teacher Factors

Information about characteristics of the teachers of these students and their schools was obtained from questionnaires completed by the teachers and the principals of the schools (see pages 297–298). A preliminary investigation of the associations between school or teacher factors was based on the correlation coefficients between those factors and the mean achievement scores for the class(es) involved at each school. Table 4.2 records some of the larger correlations between teacher and school variables and the achievements of the students.

- Teacher Experience. The achievement scores of students on the receptive aspects of literacy (reading, listening and viewing) were higher for classes in which the teachers were more experienced. However, there was almost no effect of teacher experience on speaking and only a small effect for writing at Year 3 (but not Year 5). There was also a small positive effect of teacher qualifications (in terms of the teacher having a bachelor’s degree) across several of the strands.

- Use of a Library and Computers. Where teachers made greater use of a school library or school computers, students’ achievements in most strands were higher. The use of a school technology centre also was associated with higher achievement at Year 5 but not to any appreciable extent at Year 3.

- Class Composition. There was also evidence of associations between class composition and students’ achievements in literacy. Achievements were lower in classes with high proportions of other than English-speaking students or Indigenous students. Achievements also were lower in classes with a higher proportion of students with special needs or students with a disability. Conversely, achievements were higher in classes with a high proportion of students who were classified as gifted in English (a result that is hardly surprising). These results correspond to those obtained from individual student data. They do not necessarily indicate any effect of class composition over and above individual effects. That issue requires investigation through multilevel analysis.
In addition to using correlation coefficients as simple measures of association, the investigation also used multivariate-multilevel analyses.

- Multivariate procedures are required because there are multiple influences on achievement and these influences are inter-related. Results from multivariate procedures allow inferences of the ‘other things equal’ form to be made. For example, when an association between enjoyment and achievement is observed it could reflect the influence of socio-economic background on both variables. A multivariate analysis that included all three variables would make it possible to identify the association between enjoyment and achievement after statistically allowing for the influence of socio-economic background. In these circumstances the terms ‘other things equal’ or ‘net influence’ are used to describe the results.

- Multilevel (or hierarchical) analyses are necessary because students are clustered within classes and schools and it is necessary to analyse associations between achievement and factors at the school or class level at the same time as at the school level.

### Table 4.2 Correlations between literacy achievement measures and teacher/school variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Viewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience?</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree?</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of school library?</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of technology centre?</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Index</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of background not Engl?</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of indigenous students?</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of gifted in English?</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion with special needs (Engl)?</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion with special needs (genl)?</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion with disability?</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
individual level. Multilevel analysis recognises that the process of education usually involves students and teachers working together in classrooms within schools and that information relevant to educational outcomes comes from both the individual student and the school or classroom.

The multilevel analyses used for this section incorporated multivariate procedures. Three procedures were invoked in the multilevel analyses to ensure that results were stable.

• First, the Year 3 and Year 5 data from each school were amalgamated (with appropriate standardisation) in order to generate clusters of sufficient size to provide stable estimates for each school.

• Second, the five achievement measures (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing) were combined to form a global ‘literacy’ measure for each student in the analyses. Even though the initial analyses of correlation coefficients considered each achievement measure separately, the relationships with the background variables were very similar for the five different literacy measures.

• Third, some composite measures were formed so that highly correlated variables were not separately included in the same analysis.

Variables that were significantly associated with literacy achievement, when other things were equal, are shown in Table 4.3. The numerical values in Table 4.3 are estimates of the maximum contribution of each variable (from the bottom to the top value of the scale) to students’ levels of literacy achievement. These contributions are expressed on the reporting scales described in Chapter 3 (a mean of 300 and a standard deviation of 100 on each scale at Year 3). As the results in Table 4.3 are ‘net influences’ after allowance for the influence of other measured factors, it is not appropriate to show breakdowns for different subgroups.

SCHOOL OR TEACHER VARIABLES

There were several school and teacher variables that had significant effects on achievements in literacy.

• Library Use. Extensive use of the school library was associated with a difference of as many as 27 points to students’ literacy achievements when compared with non-use of the library.

• Use of School Computers. Between classes that did not use school computers and those that used them extensively, the difference in achievement was 18 points.

• Teacher Experience. The difference in achievement associated with a difference in teacher experience from less than five years to 35 or more years was 24 scale points.

• School Location. Location in an urban rather than small rural centre is associated with a difference of about ten points on the literacy achievement scales. The urban/rural index was a three-point indicator (major urban to small rural).

• Gifted Students Program. Schools that operated a program for gifted students had achievement scores 11 points higher than schools that did not. Although this difference is what remained after controlling for a range of other factors, it could reflect differences between schools in student composition.
Table 4.3  Significant teacher/school and student variables in the two-level model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher/school variables</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of school library by teacher's class</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching experience</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of school computers by teacher's class</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of gifted students program</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/rural indicator</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student variables</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex of student</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ occupation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English main language spoken at home</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of speaking English at home</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment of reading, writing, etc</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of homework</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student independence</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No general learning difficulty</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Principles and Findings**

Mapping Literacy Achievement
Achievements in literacy were related to a number of student variables. These variables reflected student background as well as their activities and dispositions. The results in Table 4.3 show that gender, parents’ occupational status and other than English-speaking background were associated with achievement after controlling for any effects of other factors in the analysis.

- **Gender.** Other things equal, girls had higher literacy scores than boys. The net difference between girls and boys was 26 scale points.
- **Parents’ Occupational Status.** Students from high-status backgrounds had higher literacy scores than their peers from low-status backgrounds. The difference between the highest and the lowest of five categories was 30 scale points, after allowance had been made for other factors such as other than English-speaking background.
- **Other Than English-Speaking Background.** For students where English was the main language spoken at home, achievement was 20 points higher than for those for whom another language was the main language spoken at home. This value represents the net difference after allowing for the effects of other factors such as socio-economic background. It was based on information provided by the students who were asked to say whether the main language spoken at home was English or some ‘other’ language. Frequency of speaking English at home was also positively related to English literacy skills. When other variables were taken into account, speaking English ‘always’ at home was associated with a difference of about 43 points over ‘never’ speaking English at home.

In addition to the effects of these background variables there were other factors concerned with what students did and enjoyed that were linked to achievement in literacy.

- **Enjoyment of Literacy-Related Activities.** Students’ responses to questions about how much they enjoy reading books, writing, listening to stories, speaking in class, and watching films were combined to provide an overall measure of students’ enjoyment of literacy activities. This measure was positively related to literacy achievement: students reporting very positive attitudes scored as much as 70 points higher than students who said that they don’t like participating in literacy activities at all. It is worth reiterating that this was the net difference after controlling for the influence of other variables such as student background.
- **Frequency of Homework.** Doing homework ‘nearly every school day’ compared to ‘never or hardly ever’ was associated with a net difference in achievement of 24 scale points.
- **Student Independence.** The student independence index was based on students’ responses to a question asking them how often they seek help from family, relatives and friends when working at home on school work. Greater levels of reported independence are associated with higher levels of literacy achievement.

The analysis also indicated that students who had a ‘general learning difficulty’ performed less well than other students and that the difference in achievement between these two groups was large (117 scale points).
A number of variables were not included in the final model because they were not associated with achievement at a level that was statistically significant. These variables included the following:

- The country of origin of the student was not strongly associated with achievement. Coming from an English-speaking country had a small positive effect but the variable that was more important was whether English was spoken at home.

- The number of schools the student had attended did not appear to have had a negative influence on achievement.

- The existence of special school literacy programs had a small negative relationship with achievement, perhaps because these programs existed in schools where students had relatively low levels of literacy achievement.

- The existence of additional classroom support (e.g., teacher aides, specialist support staff, student tutors) also had a small negative relationship, again possibly because this support existed in classes where students had relatively low levels of literacy achievement.

The results concerned with the effects of special programs and classroom support (and it could also be said for class size) indicate the need to use longitudinal data to relate these factors to change in students’ achievements. Results from a cross-sectional survey will reflect the fact that many interventions are targeted where the need is greatest.

The following sections provide a detailed summary of students’, teachers’ and principals’ responses to a number of questions asked in the Survey. These questions were constructed to collect answers to such questions as: What kinds of literacy activities do students engage in, both during school hours and outside of school? What training have their teachers had in literacy programs? What kinds of literacy activities do teachers emphasise in their classrooms? What resources do schools have to support literacy learning?
4.2 STUDENTS

The Year 3 and Year 5 student samples were made up of slightly more girls than boys. At both Year levels, approximately 48.5% of students in the Survey were male, and 51.5% of students were female. (These are consistent with the percentages of males and females in primary schools as reported in the National Report on Schooling in Australia, MCEETYA, 1994). Approximately 3% of students in Years 3 and 5 identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. Approximately 94% of Year 3 students and 93% of Year 5 students were born in Australia. Only 2.5% of Year 3 students and 1.6% of Year 5 students had arrived in Australia within the previous three years.

Even though there was no evidence that movement between schools was associated with lower literacy achievement, the survey provided information about the extent of movement between schools. By the end of Year 3, approximately 31% of students had attended more than one primary school, and 8% of students had attended more than two schools. By Year 5 these percentages increased, with 43% of students having attended more than one primary school, and 15% having attended more than two.

Teachers described the majority of students (about 80%) at each Year level as having no learning difficulty. They described 12% of Year 3 students and 13% of Year 5 students as having a general learning difficulty, and 8% of Year 3 students and 7% of Year 5 students as having a specific literacy learning difficulty.

Even though the Survey is concerned with English literacy skills it is important to remember that a significant number of Year 3 and Year 5 students (about 17% of all students) have some competence in a language other than English. Most of these students are able to speak this other language but are unable to read or write in that language.

If the student speaks a language other than English, what is the student's level of literacy in that language?

---

**Year 3**
- Extended competence: 0.7%
- Functional: 2.9%
- Read & write but speak little: 0.9%
- Speak, but not read/write: 12.2%

**Year 5**
- Extended competence: 1.3%
- Functional: 3.5%
- Read & write but speak little: 0.5%
- Speak, but not read/write: 11.7%
The majority of students at each Year level (66% of Year 3 and 70% of Year 5 students) do homework nearly every day. Six per cent of Year 3 students and 4% of Year 5 students hardly ever or never do homework. The results of the analysis reported earlier in this chapter indicate that doing homework does make a contribution to the achievement of literacy skills.

### How often do you do homework?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nearly every day</td>
<td>66.1% 70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about once / week</td>
<td>25.3% 23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about once / month</td>
<td>2.6% 2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never / hardly ever</td>
<td>5.8% 4.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reading experiences

A number of research studies have suggested that good readers read a wide variety of material, and that attitudes to reading at school and at home are correlated with reading achievements. The National School English Literacy Survey collected data on the kinds of reading students do outside school and on their attitudes to reading in school.

Students at Years 3 and 5 report reading books at home more often than reading magazines, newspapers or comics. Most students read books at home almost every day, although the percentage of students reading books at home almost every day declines between Year 3 (73%) and Year 5 (67%). Approximately 5% of students hardly ever or never read books at home.
Students read newspapers much less frequently than they read books at home, although
27% of Year 3 students and 43% of Year 5 students read newspapers at least once a week.
The percentage of students reading newspapers increases significantly between Year 3
and Year 5.

How often do you read NEWSPAPERS at home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>every day</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once a week</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once a month</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never / hardly ever</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students read magazines slightly more often than they read newspapers. By Year 5, at least two-thirds of students read magazines at least once a month.

How often do you read MAGAZINES at home?

![Bar chart showing reading frequency of magazines by Year 3 and Year 5 students.]

More than 50% of Year 3 and Year 5 students read comics at least once a month. Approximately 18% of Year 3 students and 14% of Year 5 students read comics almost every day.

How often do you read COMICS at home?

![Bar chart showing reading frequency of comics by Year 3 and Year 5 students.]

Principles and Findings
Mapping Literacy Achievement
More than 50% of students read to family and/or friends at least once a week. The percentage of students reading to family and friends every day declines between Year 3 (35.2%) and Year 5 (22.1%). Approximately 20% of students say they never or hardly ever read to family and friends. About 35% of students shop from lists (and therefore are involved in reading the list) more than once per week.

Enjoyment of reading was found to be associated with higher achievement in reading at both Year 3 and Year 5. More than 60% of students like reading things in class, although the percentage of students who enjoy reading in class declines between Year 3 (47.7%) and Year 5 (36.7%). About 7% of students do not like reading things in class at all.
WRITING

Three questions explored the contexts in which students write: How often do you write down telephone messages? How often do you use a computer to write / word process? How much do you like writing in class?

About 50% of Year 3 students write telephone messages. By Year 5 this percentage has increased to 79%. 51% of Year 5 students write telephone messages at least once a week, and 25% write messages once a day. The majority of students use a computer (either at home or at school) to write/word process at least once a month. Over 30% of Year 3 and Year 5 students use a computer for this purpose at least once a week. The percentage of students using computers to write/word process increases slightly from Year 3 to Year 5. Approximately 40% of Year 3 and 30% of Year 5 students never or hardly ever use computers for this purpose.

How often do you use a computer to write / word process?

![Graph showing the frequency of computer use for writing in Year 3 and Year 5.](image)
The majority of students (about 70%) say they like writing in class. However, as for reading, by Year 5, students’ enjoyment of writing in class has declined (44% at Year 3 to 30% at Year 5).

**Listening**

Year 3 and Year 5 students say they listen to things being told or read by family or friends at almost the same rate: about 44% listen to things being told every day, 25% once a week, and 11% once a month. More Year 3 than Year 5 students never or hardly ever listen to things being told or read. Most students like listening to stories being told or things being read in class. As for reading and writing, however, enjoyment declines between Year 3 and Year 5.
SPEAKING

A number of questions explored the contexts in which students speak, the kinds of speaking they do, the amount of speaking they do outside of school, and how much they like speaking in class. For the majority of students (about 81%) English is the language always spoken at home. About 19% of students speak another language at home some of the time. Only about 3% of students almost always speak another language. The majority of students never or hardly ever translate things for people in their family although the percentage of students who do translate for others increases from Year 3 to Year 5.

Year 3 and Year 5 students spend about the same amount of time talking to family about the things they are doing at school. Approximately 68% of students talk about school activities every day. Slightly more Year 3 students (8%) than Year 5 students (7%) rarely talk about school activities.

How often do you talk to your family about the things you are doing at school?

![Bar chart showing the frequency of conversations about school activities between Year 3 and Year 5 students.](chart.png)

A far smaller percentage of students talk with family about things happening in the world outside school or home. The percentage of students who do increases from Year 3 (57%) to Year 5 (68%). Almost 30% of Year 3 students and 18% of Year 5 students rarely talk with family about such matters.
Fewer students like speaking in class than like reading, writing or listening to stories in class. The enjoyment of speaking in class declines from Year 3 (34%) to Year 5 (27%) although the decline is not as marked as for reading, and particularly listening and writing.

**How much do you like telling things to others in the class?**

- **Year 3**
  - A lot: 34.0%
  - Most times: 35.3%
  - Sometimes: 16.2%
  - Not at all: 14.5%

- **Year 5**
  - A lot: 27.4%
  - Most times: 40.4%
  - Sometimes: 19.1%
  - Not at all: 13.1%
**VIEWING**

Television watching increases from Year 3 to Year 5. A significant percentage of Year 3 (36%) and Year 5 (46%) students watch more than 3 hours of television or videos each weekday. Approximately 13% of Year 3 and 16% of Year 5 watch more than 5 hours each weekday.

| How many hours do you usually watch TV or videos each weekday outside of school hours? |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                                 | Year 3                          | Year 5                          |
|                                 | 12.6%  more than 5 hrs          | 16.2%                          |
|                                 | 23.9%  3-5 hours                 | 29.9%                          |
|                                 | 20.3%  2-3 hours                 | 21.0%                          |
|                                 | 22.6%  1-2 hours                 | 18.7%                          |
|                                 | 17.7%  less than 1 hr            | 12.0%                          |
|                                 | 3.1%  0 hours                    | 2.2%                           |

**4.3 TEACHERS**

The Year 3 and Year 5 teaching populations are made up predominantly of female teachers. The proportion of male teachers increases from Year 3 (16%) to Year 5 (27%). The majority of teachers at Year 3 (67%) and Year 5 (69%) held an initial three-Year primary training qualification. About 23% of teachers had obtained an initial four-Year primary training, or a bachelor degree and a Dip Ed. All teachers who participated in the Survey have obtained additional postgraduate teaching qualifications. About 50% of teachers at each Year level have obtained bachelor degrees, approximately 30% diplomas and approximately 16% certificates.

A large number of teachers (37%) had attended specific courses in the teaching of English literacy. These include ELIC, Reading Recovery, First Steps, Canberra Literacy Program, Frameworks (Assessment), Frameworks (Teaching and Learning) LLIMY, and ESL in the Mainstream. Year 3 teachers have attended these courses more recently than Year 5 teachers.
Teaching experience

The majority of teachers (60% of Year 3 and 69% of Year 5 teachers) have had more than 11 years teaching experience. About 20% have had more than 21 years experience. Nineteen per cent of Year 3 teachers and 12% of Year 5 teachers have had less than 5 years experience. Teachers of Year 5 students tend to have had more experience than teachers of Year 3 students. Some 79% of Year 3 and 68% of Year 5 teachers have had between 1 and 5 years teaching experience at their current grade level. Fewer than 8% have more than 10 years experience at their current level.

How many years teaching experience do you have?
**CLASSROOM STRUCTURE**

The classroom structure in which most Year 3 (64%) and Year 5 (60%) teachers are working is the single-level class. Slightly more teachers at Year 5 level than Year 3 are teaching in multi-age or composite classes. Classroom structure was not associated with differences in achievement. The majority of teachers (58%) who are working in units comprising more than one class group work with at least one other teacher. Some 24% of Year 3 and 25% of Year 5 teachers work with at least two other teachers.

**CLASSROOM PRACTICE**

Approximately half the teachers spend most of their time in English literacy classes on integrated activities. Over 30% spend most of their time on reading activities and about 20% spend most of their time on writing activities.
Almost half the teachers (47% at Year 3 and 42% at Year 5) spend the least amount of time in literacy classes on viewing activities.

Use of the library and use of school computers were two factors associated with higher achievement scores. Teachers report that the majority of students make moderate or extensive use of the school library. The time students spend in the library does not increase significantly from Year 3 to Year 5.

To what extent do your students use the school library in developing their English literacy skills?
Teachers report that the majority of students (63% at Year 3 and 56% at Year 5) make limited or no use of school computers in developing their English literacy skills but that the use of computers increases from Year 3 to Year 5.

To what extent do your students use school computers in developing their English literacy skills?

**Year 3**
- 5.2% extensive
- 31.3% moderate
- 42.9% limited
- 20.7% none

**Year 5**
- 8.7% extensive
- 35.5% moderate
- 39.1% limited
- 16.8% none

---

**4.4 Schools**

Most schools provide additional support for developing the English literacy skills of students. In more than 85% of schools, parent volunteers work with students. Specialist support staff and teachers’ aides are available in the majority of schools also. About 40% of schools have older student or peer tutor programs.

What additional support does your school provide for developing the English literacy skills of students?

**Year 3**
- 58.5% teacher aide
- 86.9% parent volunteers
- 73.2% specialist support staff
- 39.9% peer tutors
- 42.0% older student tutors
- 19.4% other

**Year 5**
- 59.1% teacher aide
- 86.8% parent volunteers
- 72.8% specialist support staff
- 40.1% peer tutors
- 42.5% older student tutors
- 19.8% other
4.5 Special Indigenous Sample

This section considers the literacy learning contexts in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (largely in rural and remote settings) develop literacy skills. The Special Indigenous Sample in the National School English Literacy Survey was not a representative sample of all Indigenous students in Australia. The sample was drawn only from schools reporting at least five Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students at each of Years 3 and 5. For this reason no comparisons were made between achievements of the Special Indigenous Sample and achievements of the Main Sample. However, the data provide a picture of the literacy learning contexts for the Special Indigenous Sample that can be understood in relation to the Main Sample. The picture provided here is not a picture of literacy learning for all Indigenous students, but a picture of literacy learning contexts for a sub-group of Indigenous students, largely in rural and remote settings. Year 3 and Year 5 students have been combined in the following analyses. Students in the ‘Main Sample’ are the randomly selected participants in the Survey. Approximately 3% of these students are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students.

Mobility and Absence

There was evidence of greater mobility between schools in the Special Indigenous Sample than among other students. On average (across Years 3 and 5), 47% of Special Indigenous Sample students have attended more than one school, and 21% have attended more than two schools. In comparison, 39% of Main Sample students have attended more than one school and 11% more than two schools.

Indigenous students are absent from school an average of 17.9 days per year (compared with 6.2 days per year in the general student population). There is a much greater range in the number of days that Special Indigenous Sample students are absent compared with Main Sample students.
LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH

A significant number of students (29%) from the Special Indigenous Sample speak a language other than English at home. Approximately 10% of the Indigenous students sampled, hardly ever, or never speak English at home. This compares with 3% of students from the Main Sample.

How often do you speak English at home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SIS</th>
<th>Main Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>always</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hardly ever</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many Indigenous students (26%) have some competence in a language other than English. Most of these students (21%) are able to speak this other language but are unable to read or write in this language. This compares with 12% of students from the general student population. It should be noted that, traditionally, Aboriginal languages did not have a written form.

If a language other than English is spoken at home, what is the student's level of literacy in that other language?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SIS</th>
<th>Main Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>extended competence</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>functional literacy</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read &amp; write but speak little</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speak but not read or write</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOMEWORK PATTERNS

When asked how often they do homework, 36% of Special Indigenous Sample students report completing homework each day and 26% hardly ever or never doing homework. The majority of students in the Main Sample (68%) report doing homework every school day.

READING

Outside of school, students from the Special Indigenous Sample read less often than students from the Main Sample. This applies to most forms of reading material but the difference is largest for the reading of books. Only 42% of Special Indigenous Sample students read books at home every day and approximately 23% hardly ever or never read books at home. In contrast, about 70% of students from the general population read books every day and only 5% report hardly ever or never reading books at home.
Indigenous students read magazines less often than they read books, but slightly more often than they read newspapers. Thirty-two per cent of Special Indigenous Sample students read magazines at home at least once a week (which is only a little lower than the 37% from the main sample) and 57% hardly ever or never read magazines (compared with 44% of Main Sample students).

By the end of Year 5, 27% of Special Indigenous Sample students read newspapers at home at least once a week (compared with 35% of the general student population). However, the majority of Special Indigenous Sample students (63%) hardly ever or never read newspapers at home (compared to 50 per cent of the general student population). In terms of comics there was a small difference in the frequency of reading: 31% of Special Indigenous Sample students read comics at least once a week compared to 36 per cent of the general population.

The majority of Special Indigenous Sample students (68%) read to family and friends at least once a month. This compares with 79% of Main Sample students. Approximately 31% of Indigenous students never or hardly ever read to family and friends. The percentage of students who report reading to family or friends every day is similar for both groups of students.
Sixty-six per cent of students in the Special Indigenous Sample report liking reading most times or a lot. This compares with 75% of students from the Main Sample. Some 9% of Special Indigenous Sample students (compared with 7% of Main Sample students) don’t like reading in class at all.

![How much do you like reading things in class?](image1)

**Writing**

In response to the questions asked, Indigenous students report that they write less than students from the Main Sample. Fifty-two per cent of Special Indigenous Sample students use a computer to write/word process at least once a month compared with 62% of Main Sample students.

![How often do you use a computer to write / word process?](image2)
The majority of Indigenous students (60%) hardly ever or never write down telephone messages. Approximately 30% of Special Indigenous Sample students, compared with 43% of students from the general population, write down messages at least once a week.

**How often do you write down telephone messages?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Main Sample</th>
<th>SIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>every day</strong></td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>once a week</strong></td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>once a month</strong></td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>never / hardly ever</strong></td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some 68% of Special Indigenous Sample students (compared with 74% of Main Sample students) like writing most times or a lot of the time.

**How much do you like writing in class?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Main Sample</th>
<th>SIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a lot</strong></td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>most times</strong></td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>sometimes</strong></td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>not at all</strong></td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LISTENING

The majority of Indigenous students listen to things being told or read by family and friends. Over 60% of students listen at least once a week. Slightly more Special Indigenous Sample students (22%) than Main Sample students (19%) report hardly ever or never listening.

How often do you listen to things being told or read by family or friends?

The majority of students from the Special Indigenous Sample (84%) like listening to stories being told or things being read in class. Students prefer listening to reading, writing, and telling things to others in class. More Special Indigenous Sample students like listening a lot than do Main Sample students.

How much do you like listening to stories being told or things being read in class?
**Speaking**

Most Indigenous students (79%) talk to family about school activities at least once a week but 20% talk about school activities as infrequently as once a month or less. A higher percentage of students in the Main Sample tend to talk to their family about school than Special Indigenous Sample students: the corresponding figures for the Main Sample are 87% and 13%.

Far fewer Indigenous students than students in the Main Sample talk to family about things that are happening in the world outside school or home, rather than talk about school activities. Around 49% of Special Indigenous Sample students talk about world affairs more than once a week (compared with 62% of Main Sample students). Forty percent of Special Indigenous Sample students hardly ever or never talk about world affairs. There is very little difference between the Special Indigenous Sample and the main sample in the extent to which they translate things for people in the family. Indigenous students like telling things to others in class less than they like to read, write, view and listen. Some 25% of Special Indigenous Sample students, compared with 14% of Main Sample students, report that they do not like telling things to others in class at all.

**Viewing**

A large majority of Special Indigenous Sample students (77%) watch more than two hours of television or videos each weekday. This is a somewhat higher percentage than the corresponding figure of 62% for the general population of Year 3 and Year 5 students in the main sample. At high levels of television viewing the difference was more marked: 21% of students in the Special Indigenous Sample (compared to 14% of the main sample) watch more than five hours of television or videos per day.
Watching videos and films in class is a popular activity among all students in Years 3 and 5. In the main sample 88% of students like this activity most times or a lot. Students from the Special Indigenous Sample were similar in this preference: 87% of Indigenous students like this activity most times or a lot. As for the Main Sample, students from the Indigenous Sample prefer to watch videos and films in class rather than to read, write, listen, or tell things to others; but from this sample the gap in preferences is larger.

How much do you like looking at videos and films in class?

- **Main Sample**
  - 59.6% like it a lot
  - 28.4% like it most times
  - 9.7% like it sometimes
  - 2.3% do not like it at all

- **SIS**
  - 68.9% like it a lot
  - 18.1% like it most times
  - 10.8% like it sometimes
  - 2.3% do not like it at all

---

**How many hours do you usually watch TV or videos each weekday outside of school hours?**

- **Main Sample**
  - More than 5 hours: 14.4%
  - 3-5 hours: 26.9%
  - 2-3 hours: 20.6%
  - 1-2 hours: 20.6%
  - Less than 1 hour: 14.8%
  - 0 hours: 2.6%

- **SIS**
  - More than 5 hours: 21.2%
  - 3-5 hours: 33.4%
  - 2-3 hours: 22.1%
  - 1-2 hours: 15.0%
  - Less than 1 hour: 7.5%
  - 0 hours: 0.8%
4.6 In Summary

A number of diverse factors associated with individuals, homes and schools or classrooms are associated with differences in the literacy achievements of primary school students. Student background was associated with achievements in patterns that were consistent with other research literature. It was of interest that differences between girls and boys and differences associated with socio-economic background were evident at an early stage of schooling.

Some literacy-related activities of students outside of school were associated with their achievements. This serves as a reminder that schools are not the only agencies that nurture the development of literacy skills. Communication at home (about school and about other events) was associated with higher achievements, as was reading at home and the frequency of doing homework (especially if done independently). Watching a lot of television had a small negative association with achievement. Even though a number of these factors were linked to other aspects of home background, and did not remain after the multivariate analysis, their presence in the initial analysis of correlations suggests some ways through which home background might be linked to achievement.

Students’ enjoyment of literacy activities such as reading was linked to achievement, even after controlling for the influence of other factors. Even though the direction of the link could not be established with these data, the result points to an area that could contribute to an understanding of the development of literacy. The data also show a decline in students’ enjoyment of reading, writing and listening (and to a lesser extent speaking) from Year 3 to Year 5.

At school or classroom level there was evidence of higher achievement where teachers were more experienced, and evidence of the benefits of the use of some resources such as the school library and school computers (even though there was not much use of the latter in these Years). It also appeared that achievement was higher in urban than rural areas. However, it is not possible to investigate the influence of interventions such as special literacy programs because they are targeted where the need is greatest. What is required to understand the impact of these factors, and other school and classroom variables such as different approaches to teaching, is longitudinal data through which growth in achievement can be analysed. It would be possible to use these data to identify schools and classrooms where achievement was higher than would have been predicted on the basis of background characteristics, and to undertake detailed investigations of what happens in those environments.

The Survey data also provide descriptive information about the frequency with which students in Years 3 and 5 engage in various literacy activities. It is difficult to summarise this information but an example may illustrate its nature. Reading books at home is a common activity among primary school children although it declines in extensiveness as they move through school: 73% of Year 3 students, but only 67% of Year 5 students read books every day. Moreover, while reading books is a common activity, between 8% and 11% of students read books only once per month or less frequently. Descriptive information such as this has been reported in detail to provide an indication of the things that primary school students do, in and out of school, that are potentially related to their development of literacy.
Survey Procedures

Margaret Forster
Geoff N Masters

with the assistance of

John Ainley
Wendy Bodey
Peter Congdon
Wendy Dick
Trevor Johnson
Robin McNab
In June 1995, following a public call for tenders, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was commissioned to undertake a trial of procedures for collecting valid and reliable data on English literacy achievements of Australian students in Years 3, 5, and 10. The trial was commissioned by a management committee (Figure 5.1) established by the Steering Committee (see Introduction, page 3).

Figure 5.1 Members of the Management Committee for the 1995 Trial

**Purpose**

The purpose of the trial was to explore the feasibility of two alternative procedures for collecting reliable data on students’ English literacy achievements with a view to their possible use in a 1996 Survey of the English literacy performances and practices of Australian primary and secondary school students.

**Aims**

The specific aims of the trial were to:

- trial two procedures for collecting data on school student outcomes from the English profile in Years 3, 5 and 10 in mid-October to mid-November 1995;
- use existing English literacy assessment materials aligned with the English profile for Australian schools;
- evaluate at each of the three stages of schooling the feasibility of each procedure taking into account the effectiveness of
  
  (i) the data-gathering process, including the use of workshops at national and State/Territory level to provide training in English literacy assessment; and
  
  (ii) strategies for analysing the data
  
  possible variations on both these procedures;
- investigate procedures for collecting background information on student characteristics and on schools’ English literacy policies and practices; and
- make recommendations by the end of February 1996 to the National School English...
Literacy Survey Steering Committee about possible procedures to be used in the proposed national survey to be implemented in mid-1996.

**Trial participation**

A total of 174 teachers and 41 external assessors participated in the trial. Each teacher collected data on five students, resulting in 870 participating students. These students came from government, Catholic and independent schools in most States and Territories but did not constitute a nationally representative sample from these systems.

**Trial procedures**

The Trial investigated two alternative procedures for collecting reliable data on students’ literacy achievements. Half the participating teachers and students were assigned to one procedure, half to the other. All students, teachers and principals completed questionnaires to provide information on student backgrounds and schools’ literacy policies and practices. At the completion of the trial, feedback was sought from participating teachers and external assessors.

Procedure 1 involved collecting data on the English literacy achievements of students by giving teachers a list of outcomes on computer disk and asking them to judge how often individuals demonstrated achievement of each outcome. All Procedure 1 students then completed a set of common tasks in reading, viewing, speaking, listening, and writing which were assessed by teachers using provided assessment criteria. Teachers’ outcome judgements were compared with students’ common task performances to explore the possibility of statistically moderating teachers’ outcome judgements if necessary.

Procedure 2 involved collecting data on the English literacy achievements of students by having teachers work with external assessors to assess pieces of student work. The work assessed included common tasks completed under timed conditions, and specified classroom work collected in ‘portfolios’. All assessments were made against assessment criteria developed by ACER.

To investigate inter-rater reliability, samples of student work (common tasks and portfolios) were collected centrally and independently reassessed. Teachers also were asked to submit their assessments of videotaped speaking performances to ACER.

The two procedures were evaluated and compared in terms of their validity, reliability, and feasibility as methods of collecting national data on students’ English literacy achievements. Did each procedure provide evidence about a broad range of literacy skills? Was it seen by teachers and external assessors as providing a valid picture of individuals’ literacy achievements? Were assessments made reliably? Could they be used as a basis for dependable national data? How practicable were the arrangements for data collection in terms of demands on class time and the cost of each procedure?

**Trial results**

Analysis of trial results showed a trade-off between validity, reliability, and feasibility in the collection of nationally comparable data on students’ English literacy achievements.

Procedure 1 (providing outcomes on a computer screen and asking teachers to key in their judgements outcome-by-outcome) was administratively very convenient, but the trial suggested that it produced results which were unreliable and about which teachers were sceptical.
Procedure 2 (teachers and external assessors jointly assessing pieces of students’ work against provided criteria) was found to be administratively demanding and resource intensive. On the other hand, teachers saw the common task–portfolio combination as capable of providing valid measures of English literacy achievement at Years 3 and 5. They also were very supportive of the collection of portfolio evidence even though it was time consuming. The trial suggested that acceptable levels of reliability could be achieved for some categories of student work.

The trial results produced high levels of inter-marker reliability on common tasks in reading, viewing, and listening. Acceptable levels of reliability appeared to be achievable on common task writing and perhaps speaking. The only components of student portfolios which produced acceptable levels of reliability were the writing components, and some of the speaking evidence.

The questionnaires developed and used in the Trial were found to be useful for collecting a range of evidence about student backgrounds and schools’ literacy practices. Teachers found the questionnaires long and sometimes repetitive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of ACER’s report on the Trial results, the Management Committee recommended to the Steering Committee that a 1996 Survey proceed, at Years 3 and 5 only, using a modified form of Procedure 2 to collect achievement data, and a modified set of questionnaires to collect background data on literacy achievements. It recommended also that consideration be given to conducting a survey at the secondary level, using a similar methodology, at a later stage, when appropriate assessment materials had been developed.

In April 1996 the Federal Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, Dr David Kemp, announced that the National School English Literacy Survey would take place. A Survey Management Committee (Figure 5.2) was set up to implement the Survey. On its advice, the Commonwealth commissioned ACER to undertake the work to collect valid and reliable data on the English literacy achievement of students in Year 3 and Year 5 only.
### Government Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name and Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Mr Graham Harrington, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development (Chair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>Ms Margaret Willis, Manager Outcomes and Reporting Branch, ACT Department of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Mr Lindsay Wasson, Director of Curriculum, NSW Department of School Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Dr Harry Payne, Deputy Secretary, Curriculum and Assessment, NT Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Mr Brian Rout, Director, Studies Directorate, Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Mr Jim Dellit, Executive Director, Curriculum, SA Department for Education and Children’s Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Mr Ross Kimber, Assistant General Manager, Curriculum Development and Learning Technologies, Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Mr Peter Hamilton, Director, Executive Support, Education Department of Western Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Non-Government Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Name and Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Catholic Education Commission</td>
<td>Dr Vin Thomas, Co-ordinator, Curriculum and Education, Catholic Education Office, Adelaide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Council of Independent Schools Associations</td>
<td>Mr David Robertson, Executive Director (Operations), Victorian Association of Independent Schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Teacher Unions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Name and Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Education Union</td>
<td>Ms Sharan Burrow, Federal President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Education Union of Australia</td>
<td>Ms Lynne Rolley, Federal Secretary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Commonwealth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name and Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Officer</td>
<td>Ms Elizabeth Allison, Schools Division, DEETYA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.2 Members of the National School English Literacy Survey Management Committee (1996–7)**
5.2 Development of Survey Instruments

In 1995, ACER was commissioned by the Survey Management Committee to develop Year 5 literacy assessment instruments for the proposed 1996 Survey. The materials were to be similar to ACER’s Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART) for upper primary students, which was used in the Survey trial. The assessment tasks were designed to be as appropriate as possible for the full range of students. (The trial materials were not suitable for a survey of this size because they had been published and widely exposed since their release in 1994.)

The developers of the achievement assessment instruments met at regular intervals with the Materials Reference Group, and supporting experts (Figure 5.3) established by the Survey Management Committee. The Reference Group included literacy experts and representatives of multicultural education associations, teachers of English as a second language associations, and Indigenous education groups.

A decision was made to use ACER’s new, unpublished DART English kit, for middle primary students, which was under development at the time, for the Year 3 Survey assessment instruments.

Mr Graham Harrington, Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts (Convenor)
Dr Paul Brock, Australian Language and Literacy Council
Ms Sharan Burrow, Australian Education Union
Professor Trevor Cairney, University of Western Sydney
Mr Jim Dellit, SA Department for Education and Children’s Services
Ms Marion Meiers, Australian Literacy Federation
Ms Lynne Rolley, Independent Education Union
Mr Noel Simpson, Quality Schooling Branch, Schools and Curriculum Division, DEETYA

Supporting Experts
Ms Helen Campagna-Wildash, South Australia
Ms Natasha McNamara, Centre for Indigenous Development, Education Strategies and Research, Wollongong University
Mr Gavin Morris, Education Department of Western Australia
Ms Elina Raso, Victorian Association for Teaching Multicultural Education
Ms Chris Searle, Australian Council of TESOL Associations
Ms Bernadette Thorne, NSW Department of School Education

Figure 5.3 Members of the National School English Literacy Survey Materials Reference Group and supporting experts
The Management Committee established a Questionnaire Reference Group with supporting experts (Figure 5.4) to work with ACER to refine the background questionnaires used in the trial for use in the 1996 Survey.

| Mr Jim Dellit, SA Department for Education and Children's Services (Convenor) |
| Mr Brian Rout, Director, Studies Directorate, Queensland Department of Education |
| Mr Noel Simpson, Acting Assistant Secretary, Quality Schooling Branch, Schools and Curriculum Division, DEETYA |
| Dr Vin Thomas, Co-ordinator, Curriculum and Education, Catholic Education Office, Adelaide |
| Mr Lindsay Wasson, Director, Curriculum, NSW Department of School Education |

Supporting Experts

| Dr Paul Brock, Australian Literacy Federation |
| Ms Pam Cahir, Australian Council of State School Organisations |
| Professor Trevor Cairney, University of Western Sydney |
| Mr Leo Dunne, Australian Parents' Council |
| Ms Josephine Lonergan, Australian Parent Council |
| Ms Marion Meiers, Australian Literacy Federation in consultation with experts from ALF including Ms Elina Raso, Victorian Association for Teaching Multicultural Education, and Ms Chris Searle, Australian Council of TESOL Associations |
| Dr Ian Morgan, Australian Council of State School Organisations |
| Ms Lynne Rolley, Independent Education Union |
| Professor Richard Teese, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne |
| Ms Elizabeth Allison, DEET (Executive Officer) |

Figure 5.4 Survey Questionnaire Reference Group and supporting experts
6.1 Survey Overview

Five sets of Survey activities required co-ordination:

- developing Survey instruments for collecting achievement data and background information;
- managing data collection, analysis and reporting;
- organising and managing professional development workshops at the national and State/Territory level;
- delivering national and State/Territory training; and
- administering teacher release funds.

ACER took responsibility for developing the Survey instruments (with support from the Materials Reference Group and Questionnaire Reference Group sub-committees); for selecting the samples; for delivering the national professional development workshop; and for supervising the data collection, data cleaning, central sampling, reliability studies, data entry, data analyses and report writing.

The Management Committee established a Professional Development/Training Subcommittee (Figure 6.1) to plan the national and State/Territory level training workshops.

Chairperson: Mr Ross Kimber, Victorian Directorate of School Education

Ms Sharan Burrow, Australian Education Union
Ms Helen Campagna-Wildash, CESCEO
Ms Margaret Forster, ACER
Mr David Howes, Victorian Directorate of School Education
Ms Christine Ludwig, Queensland Department of Education
Ms Lynne Rolley, Independent Education Union
Ms Bernadette Thorne, NSW Department of Education

Consultant: Ms Marion Meiers, Australian Literacy Federation
Ms Elizabeth Allison, DEET (Executive Officer)

**Figure 6.1 Members of the Professional Development/Training Sub-committee**

The Victorian Directorate of School Education convened this Sub-committee, which took responsibility for organising the national professional development workshop, including the administration of funds and co-ordinating the work of the training design. The Tasmanian Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development took responsibility for managing and funding teacher release.

The Management Committee agreed to provide additional funds to support State-level co-ordination activities, which were particularly demanding in the larger States. Figure 6.2 lists the State/Territory co-ordinators and contacts.
6.2 Professional Development and the Data Collection Process

The decision to use varied evidence of students’ literacy achievements, including samples of work completed as part of regular classroom activities, and the decision to involve classroom teachers directly in the assessment of student work resulted in a complex survey design.

Figure 6.4 on page 254 illustrates the process by which achievement and background data were collected. External assessors were trained centrally in the administration of Survey procedures and the assessment of student work. They in turn delivered workshops to participating teachers who, in collaboration with external assessors, made judgements about the literacy achievements of participating students. The primary purpose of professional development and marker training was to maximise the reliability and comparability of the Survey data by ensuring common understandings of the assessment tasks and assessment criteria. (There were significant intrinsic professional development benefits for participating teachers and external assessors, see Introduction pages 9–10.) All completed student work and assessments of that work were then forwarded to ACER for central reliability sampling, and for entry and analysis (see pages 279–286).
**FIGURE 6.3** SURVEY ACTIVITIES AND ORGANISATIONS RESPONSIBLE

- **Management Committee**
  - ACER
  - Survey instrument development
  - Sample selection
  - National professional development workshop training 100 External Assessors
  - Survey period
  - Data collection
  - Collaborative assessment Teachers and External Assessors
  - Data return
  - Central reliability sampling
  - Data entry
  - Data analyses
  - Report

- **Materials Reference Group & Questionnaire Reference Committee**

- **Professional Development Sub-committee** convened by Victorian Directorate of School Education (organising national professional development workshop, including the administration of funds)

- **Tasmanian Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development** (managing and funding teacher release)

- **State/Territory co-ordinators** (liaison role)

- **State/Territory professional development workshops**

- **External Assessors training 900 teachers**

- **Professional Development Sub-committee**

- **ACER**
External Assessor training
national training workshop

Teacher training
regional training workshop

Administration and marking of Survey tasks
Teachers and External Assessors work collaboratively
to assess student work against provided criteria.

STUDENT PORTFOLIO

Writing
Listening
Speaking
Viewing
Reading

Common Tasks

Writing

Speaking

Best Work

All completed student work, all assessments of that work, and all
questionnaire responses forwarded to ACER for central
reliability sampling and analysis.

Figure 6.4 Process for collecting achievement and background data
The main sample for the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey was selected using a three-stage design:

- select 400 schools which were nationally representative of the Year 3 and Year 5 populations of each of the eight Australian States and Territories;
- select one Year 3 and one Year 5 class from within each selected school; and
- select ten students from within each of the selected Year 3 and 5 classes.

SELECTING SCHOOLS

The number of schools selected from each State and Territory was based on the State or Territory proportion of the Australian total of Year 3 and Year 5 students. For example, NSW has 33.96% of the Australian population of Year 3 and Year 5 students, so approximately 33.96% of the 400 schools (136 NSW schools) were selected. The number of schools selected from each State and Territory is shown in Table 7.1.

A sampling interval for each State and Territory was calculated by dividing the number of Year 3 and Year 5 students in that State by the number of schools to be sampled in that State. These intervals are shown in the Sampling Interval column of Table 7.2. Schools were listed in postcode order on the assumption that if School X declined to participate in the survey then School X + 1 from the same postcode region is more like School X than a school from a different postcode area. As a starting point, a random number in each state’s Year 3 and Year 5 cumulative total, and within the State’s sampling interval range, was selected and the appropriate State sampling interval was added, selecting a school after each addition.

Table 7.1 Numbers of targeted and replacement schools in the main sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>No of Targeted Schools</th>
<th>Targeted Schools Achieved</th>
<th>Replacement Schools Achieved</th>
<th>Total Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each of the 400 selected schools was invited to participate in the Survey. It was a condition that both Year 3 and Year 5 students participate. If a school declined to participate, the next school on the list from the same sector (government, non-government or Catholic) was approached as a replacement. This process was repeated until a school at or near the targeted postcode area agreed to participate. Of the initial sample of 400 schools, 166 (41.5%) accepted and a total of 973 schools were approached to achieve the final sample. The final sample consisted of 379 schools or 94.75% of the target number. A small number of withdrawals occurred after the final sample was established. These are summarised in Table 7.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Year 3 and Year 5 Students</th>
<th>Proportion of Australian Total</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Sampling Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>166474</td>
<td>33.96</td>
<td>135.84 (136)</td>
<td>1226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>120308</td>
<td>24.77</td>
<td>99.08 (99)</td>
<td>1214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>97331</td>
<td>17.89</td>
<td>71.56 (72)</td>
<td>1360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>57667</td>
<td>9.70</td>
<td>38.80 (39)</td>
<td>1486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>40136</td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>31.48 (31)</td>
<td>1275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>12988</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>10.88 (11)</td>
<td>1194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>9202</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>7.88 (8)</td>
<td>1168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>5725</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>4.48 (4)</td>
<td>1278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>400.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SELECTING CLASSES

Schools accepting the invitation to participate in the Survey were asked to provide the names of Year 3 and Year 5 teachers willing to participate. Where more than one teacher at a Year level offered to participate, ACER randomly selected one teacher. In sixty schools more than one Year 5 teacher accepted the invitation to participate. In 66 schools more than one Year 3 teacher accepted the invitation.

SELECTING STUDENTS

The Survey methodology required the selection of ten students from each Year 3 and each Year 5 class. Schools provided class lists of student names to ACER. For each class, names were ordered alphabetically and each fourth student on the list was selected until a total of ten students was selected. A further four students were selected in this way as substitutes. Parent permission was required before students could participate. Parents gave permission on the understanding that individual students’ results would not be reported. Students who had been in Australia for less than one year or who had intellectual disabilities were excluded if the teacher requested exclusion.

Some substitutions occurred because selected students had left the school, or parent permission could not be obtained (eg six parents withdrew permission after having granted it, and four refused permission on religious grounds). Teachers requested exclusion for fifteen students prior to the collection of achievement data (one visually impaired, six new arrivals, eight integration students); and thirteen after the data had been returned (one new arrival, two students with learning difficulties, and ten integration students).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>No of Targeted Schools</th>
<th>Whole school withdrawal after receipt of acceptance and class lists</th>
<th>Losses due to other special circumstances (eg illness, accident)</th>
<th>Total Schools Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>136 #</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 Year 5</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>4#</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>1 Year 5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 Year 5</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>1 Year 5</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 Year 5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 Year 5</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# did not reach target

Table 7.3 Withdrawals from the main sample

---

Survey Sample
An assumption of the Survey methodology was that teachers were in the best position to make judgements about their students’ literacy achievements, and that the validity of the achievement data would be enhanced if teachers worked closely with students in their own classes (see chapter 2 Survey Principles). In a few instances, however, the usual class teacher did not carry out the assessments (eg in one case the principal took responsibility for the assessments; in two cases external assessors assessed participating students). In many classrooms students did not appear to work with one main teacher. In at least ninety schools, students worked in units comprising more than one class group, with more than one teacher. In other classes students worked with two teachers who operated as a team, each working a two- or three-day week; or were grouped across classes and timetabled for English activities with a second teacher (see literacy learning contexts, classroom structure, page 222).

The total number of participating students is shown in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4 Participating students in the main sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>2442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>1366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7454</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.2 Special Indigenous Sample

The Special Indigenous Sample was selected using a three-stage design:
- select 50 schools;
- select one Year 3 and one Year 5 class from within each selected school; and
- select 5 to 10 students from within each of the selected Year 3 and Year 5 classes.

Selecting schools

Using a data base of the estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australian schools, all schools which were expected to have ten or more Indigenous students at both Years 3 and 5, and which had not already been approached to be in the sample of 400 schools, were invited to participate in the Survey as part of the Special Indigenous Sample. Initially 109 schools were approached to achieve a targeted sample size of 50 schools. It was then decided that a more representative sample was needed, and schools with five or more Indigenous students at both Years 3 and 5 were included in the sampling list. The schools were arranged in postcode order and a random sample of 50 schools was drawn. Schools on the initial sample list were accepted into the survey.
whether or not they were on the final sample list, and replacement schools were approached for schools on the final list who had declined the invitation to participate.

The numbers of schools in the target and achieved samples in each State and Territory are shown in Table 7.5. One box of materials was lost in transit to ACER, reducing the participating Special Indigenous Sample schools from 52 to 51.

The total number of participating students is shown in Table 7.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Target Schools</th>
<th>Achieved Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 33 of the participating schools, the Survey tasks were administered by the class teacher or by the school literacy teacher. In 18 schools, students were gathered from across classes. It should be noted, however, that many schools offered this alternative as normal classroom management procedure.
Table 7.7 shows the distribution of students from both the Main and Special Indigenous Samples by population centre: students whose schools are located in centres with a population of fewer than 2 000, centres with a population between 2 000 and 100 000, and centres with a population greater than 100 000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>773</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.6 Participating students in the Special Indigenous Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>773</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.7 Percentage distribution of sample by population centre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>&gt;100 000</th>
<th>2 000–100 000</th>
<th>&lt;2 000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Sample</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(all students)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Sample</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Indigenous Sample</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.3 ACHIEVEMENT DATA RETURNS

The following tables show submitted work on which the achievement measures in writing, reading, viewing, listening, and speaking were based.

Table 7.8 shows Main Sample ‘common task’ submitted work and Table 7.9 ‘best work’.

Table 7.10 shows Special Indigenous Sample ‘common task’ submitted work and Table 7.11 ‘best work’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Viewing</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>3678</td>
<td>3621</td>
<td>3669</td>
<td>3634</td>
<td>3470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>3652</td>
<td>3619</td>
<td>3599</td>
<td>3651</td>
<td>3485</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>3699</td>
<td>3699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>3651</td>
<td>3651</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Viewing</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.4 Background Data Returns

The following table (7.12) shows the intended and achieved percentages of questionnaire returns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Intended Proportions</th>
<th>Achieved Proportions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.13 shows the total numbers of student and teacher questionnaire returns. Figures include both the Main and Special Indigenous samples. School questionnaires were completed by every school (431) that participated in the Survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student questionnaire</th>
<th>Teacher questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>4204</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>4144</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The National School English Literacy Survey instruments were designed to gather data on the range of literacy achievement covered in the broad definition of literacy adopted by the Steering Committee (see pages 50–51). The Survey instruments therefore assessed aspects of literacy as defined by the English profile strands and outcomes.

English profile outcomes are structured into three ‘strands’, ‘Speaking and listening’, ‘Reading and viewing’, and ‘Writing’, which correspond to the language modes of English. Aspects of literacy within each of the three modes were assessed.

Within each profile strand, outcomes are structured into four ‘substrands’: ‘Texts’, ‘Contextual understanding’, ‘Linguistic structures and features’, and ‘Strategies’. These organisers provide different ways of looking at students’ performances. Texts focuses on what students are doing with what kinds of texts; contextual understandings focuses on students’ understandings of socio-cultural and situational contexts; linguistic structures and features focuses on students’ use of linguistic structures and features of text; and strategies focuses on how students go about composing and comprehending text. Aspects of literacy within each of these substrands were assessed.

Within each profile strand, outcomes are organised into eight ‘levels’. These levels are broadly defined ranges of achievement. Aspects of literacy were assessed at 5 levels of the profile.

An overview of the English profile (Curriculum Corporation, 1994) showing the strands, sub-strands and outcomes at the five levels addressed in the Survey can be found at the end of Chapter 8.

8.1 PROFILES STRANDS

Within the framework of the three English profile strands: Speaking and listening, Reading and viewing, and Writing, five dimensions of literacy: Writing, Reading, Viewing, Speaking, and Listening were assessed in the Survey.

The Writing instruments assessed the following aspects of literacy as defined by the Writing strand of the profile:

- the ability to write a range of text types including narrative and argument;
- evidence of quality of thought and sense of purpose, including the ability to express ideas, to write imaginatively, to develop an argument clearly and logically, to support a point of view, and to be aware of audience;
- the ability to control the elements of language including sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary.

The Reading and Viewing instruments assessed the following aspects of literacy as defined by the Reading and viewing strand of the profile:

- the ability to read, view and interpret a range of fiction and non-fiction texts with some critical awareness;
- the ability to understand the main themes, ideas and points of view expressed in written and viewed text;
- appreciation of the writer’s craft; and
- awareness of the relationship between the medium and the message.
The Speaking and Listening instruments assessed the following aspects of literacy as defined by the Speaking and listening strand of the profile:

- the ability to use spoken language effectively as required by the formal school environment;
- the ability to describe and explain ideas to others;
- the ability to express the main ideas in a text to others; and
- the ability to understand the main themes, ideas and points of view expressed in spoken texts.

8.2 Profile Outcomes

In total, at Levels 1–5 of the English profile, there are 60 outcomes in Speaking and listening, Reading and viewing, and Writing. Eight of these outcomes are further sub-divided.

At Year 3, outcomes from levels, 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the profile were addressed by the Survey instruments. At Year 5, outcomes from levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 were addressed. The three grids below show outcomes addressed with a tick (✔); those not addressed with a cross (✗). Where two ticks appear alongside one another the two separate parts of an outcome have been addressed. Where a cross appears alongside a tick, one part of an outcome only has been addressed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Procedures

Mapping Literacy Achievement
### Reading and viewing outcomes addressed by the Survey instruments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>Ë Ë</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>Ë Ë</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>x x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Writing outcomes addressed by the Survey instruments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>x x</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>x x</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>x x</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the case of the reading, viewing and listening instruments, a number of ‘items’ or questions were developed to address each general outcome. For example, the text outcome at level 3 of the Reading and viewing profile: *Interprets and discusses some relationships between ideas, information and events in written texts with familiar content and a small range of unfamiliar words and linguistic structures and features, and visual texts designed for general viewing* was addressed by items which assessed students’ understandings of the main theme of read or viewed texts; understandings of text details; of characters’ roles and motives in narrative texts; and of steps in a procedure.

As items were written, specific descriptions of the assessment focus of each item were developed and refined. A subset of these descriptions forms the set of ‘indicators’, or literacy behaviours, on the literacy achievement scales which were constructed from students’ performances on the Survey tasks.

To assess speaking and writing, descriptions of ‘levels of performance’ were developed. These were aligned as closely as possible with profile levels. However, because outcomes sometimes appear at a single level of the profile, without a clear link to other level outcomes, it was necessary to add to existing outcomes by conceptualising stronger and weaker performance above or below existing descriptions.
OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH PROFILE STRANDS, SUB-STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES LEVELS 1–5

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

TEXTS

1.1 Interacts informally with teachers, peers and known adults in structured classroom activities dealing briefly with familiar topics.

2.1 Interacts in more confident and extended ways in structured and spontaneous school situations.

3.1 Interacts for specific purposes with people in the classroom and school community using a small range of text types.

4.1 Interacts confidently with others in a variety of situations to develop and present familiar ideas, events and information.

5.1 Interacts with peers in structured situations, using a variety of text types to discuss familiar or accessible subjects involving challenging ideas and issues.

CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

1.2 Shows emerging awareness of school purposes and expectations for using spoken language.

2.2 Considers how own speaking and listening is adjusted in different situations.

3.2 Recognises that certain types of spoken texts are associated with particular contexts and purposes.

4.2 Considers aspects of context, purpose and audience when speaking and listening in familiar situations.

5.2 Identifies the effect of context, audience and purpose on spoken texts.

LINGUISTIC STRUCTURES AND FEATURES

1.3 Draws on implicit knowledge of the linguistic structures and features of own variety of English when expressing ideas and information and interpreting spoken texts.

2.3 Experiments with different linguistic structures and features for expressing and interpreting ideas and information.

3.3 Usually uses linguistic structures and features of spoken language appropriately for expressing and interpreting ideas and information.

4.3 Controls most linguistic structures and features of spoken language for interpreting meaning and developing and presenting ideas and information in familiar situations.

5.3 Discusses and experiments with some linguistic structures and features that enable speakers to influence audiences.
Strategies

1.4 Monitors communication of self and others.
2.4 Speaks and listens in ways that assist communication with others.
3.4 Reflects on own approach to communication and the ways in which others interact.
4.4 Assists and monitors the communication patterns of self and others.
5.4 Listens strategically and systematically records spoken information.

Reading and Viewing

Texts

1.5a Role-plays being a competent reader and consistently interprets some familiar written symbols.
1.5b Constructs meanings from visual texts designed to be viewed in segments.
2.5 Constructs and retells meanings from: short written texts with familiar topics and vocabulary, predictable text structures and frequent illustrations, and visual texts with predictable narrative structures.
3.5 Interprets and discusses some relationships between ideas, information and events in: written texts with familiar content and a small range of unfamiliar words and linguistic structures and features; visual texts designed for general viewing.
4.5 Justifies own interpretation of ideas, information and events in texts containing some unfamiliar concepts and topics and which introduce relatively complex linguistic structures and features.
5.5 Discusses themes and issues in accessible texts with challenging structures and ideas, and constructs responses interpreting these.

Contextual Understanding

1.6 Makes connections between own knowledge and experience and the ideas, events and information in texts viewed and heard read aloud.
2.6 Understands that texts are constructed by people and represent real and imaginary experience.
3.6 Identifies simple symbolic meanings and stereotypes in texts and discusses their purpose and meaning.
4.6 Explains possible reasons for people’s varying interpretation of a text.
5.6 Recognises that texts are constructed for particular purposes and to appeal to certain groups.
LINGUISTIC STRUCTURES AND FEATURES

1.7 Demonstrates emerging awareness and use of symbols and conventions when making meaning from texts.

2.7 Recognises and interprets basic linguistic structures and features of texts.

3.7 Identifies and uses the linguistic structures and features characteristic of a range of text types to construct meaning.

4.7 With teacher guidance, identifies and discusses how linguistic structures and features work to shape readers’ and viewers’ understanding of texts.

5.7 Draws on knowledge of linguistic structures and features to explain how texts are constructed.

STRATEGIES

1.8 Recognises and uses cues to predict meaning in visual and printed texts.

2.8a Uses basic strategies for interpreting written and visual texts and maintains continuity in understanding when meaning is disrupted.

2.8b With teacher guidance, selects own reading material, and gathers and sorts information on a topic from a variety of sources.

3.8a Integrates a variety of strategies for interpreting printed and visual texts.

3.8b With teacher guidance, uses several strategies for identifying resources and finding information in texts.

4.8a Selects, uses and reflects on strategies appropriate for different texts and reading or viewing purposes.

4.8b With peers, identifies information needs and finds resources for specific purposes.

5.8a Uses knowledge of principal conventions of narrative texts to construct meaning from a range of text types.

5.8b Systematically finds and records information.

WRITING

TEXTS

1.9 Produces written symbols with the intention of conveying an idea or message.

2.9 Writes brief imaginative and factual texts which include some related ideas about familiar topics.

3.9 Experiments with inter-relating ideas and information when writing about familiar topics within a small range of text types.

4.9 Uses writing to develop familiar ideas events and information

5.9 Uses a variety of text types for writing about familiar or accessible subjects and exploring challenging ideas and issues.
CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

1.10 Recognises that written language is used by people to convey meaning.
2.10 Recognises some of the purposes and advantages of writing.
3.10 Recognises that certain text types and features are associated with particular purposes and audiences.
4.10 Adjusts writing to take account of aspects of context, purpose and audience.
5.10 Identifies the specific effect of context, audience and purpose on written texts.

LINGUISTIC STRUCTURES AND FEATURES

1.11 Demonstrates emerging awareness of how to use conventional written symbols for expressing ideas and information.
2.11 Uses some basic linguistic structures and features of written language so that writing can be readily interpreted by others.
3.11 Controls most basic features of written language and experiments with some organisational and linguistic features of different text types.
4.11 Controls most distinguishing linguistic structures and features of basic text types such as stories, procedures, reports and arguments.
5.11 Controls the linguistic structures and features necessary to communicate ideas and information clearly in written texts of some length and complexity.

STRATEGIES

1.12 Experiments with and practises ways of representing ideas and information using written symbols.
2.12a Uses talk to plan and review own writing.
2.12b Usually attempts to spell words by drawing on knowledge of sound–symbol relationships and of standard letter patterns.
3.12a Experiments with strategies for planning, reviewing and proofreading own writing.
3.12b Consistently makes informed steps at spelling.
4.12a When prompted, uses a range of strategies for planning, reviewing and proofreading own writing.
4.12b Uses a multi-strategy approach to spelling.
5.12 Draws on planning and review strategies that assist in effectively completing particular tasks.
9. Assessment Methods

The evidence used to estimate students’ levels of literacy achievement in the National School English Literacy Survey is based on a variety of assessment methods, including standardised paper and pen assessments, portfolio assessments, and performance assessments.

Methods were chosen carefully to provide information about particular learning outcomes. Assessments of reading, viewing, and listening outcomes were completed through paper and pen tasks, writing outcomes through a limited portfolio of pieces, and speaking outcomes through on-the-spot performance assessments.

Two kinds of achievement evidence were collected at Year 3 and Year 5. First, students completed a set of ‘common tasks’ in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing. Second, samples of classroom work were collected for writing and speaking. These ‘best work’ samples were assembled within specified categories of student work.

9.1 Common Tasks

Standardised tasks in writing, reading, viewing, listening, and speaking were loosely linked thematically through a central video which also provided the stimulus for the viewing assessments. In the Year 3 materials, a narrative video was used to introduce a ‘myths and legends’ theme. Year 5 students watched three short videos (a narrative, a documentary, and a procedural text) within a broad ‘space things’ theme.

Tasks were administered using standardised instructions within a four- to six-week period from August to September 1996. During this time teachers were able to embed tasks in their day-to-day curricula. The assessment tasks took 9 hours at Year 3, and 7 hours and 15 minutes at Year 5. Figure 9.1 gives an overview of the common tasks at each Year level.

Writing, reading, viewing, listening, and speaking common tasks were developed within the English profile framework to assess different purposes for interacting with text, and to assess different ways of interacting with text to construct or communicate meaning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>YEAR 3</th>
<th>YEAR 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VIEWING</strong></td>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• viewing video</td>
<td>1 hour and 15 minutes in total</td>
<td>1 hour and 15 minutes in total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• completing a series of short response and multiple choice questions</td>
<td>1 hour in total</td>
<td>1 hour in total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>READING</strong></td>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reading magazine</td>
<td>1 hour in total</td>
<td>1 hour in total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• completing a series of short response and multiple choice questions</td>
<td>1 hour and 15 minutes in total</td>
<td>1 hour in total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LISTENING</strong></td>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• listening to audiotape (3 tasks)</td>
<td>1 hour in total</td>
<td>1 hour in total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• completing a series of short response, multiple choice, and drawn response questions</td>
<td>1 hour and 15 minutes in total</td>
<td>1 hour in total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPEAKING</strong></td>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two tasks: • narrative retell (rehearsal with partner and presentation)</td>
<td>1 hour and 30 minutes in total</td>
<td>1 hour in total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• character review/ opinion (small group discussion, rehearsal and presentation)</td>
<td>1 hour and 30 minutes in total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WRITING</strong></td>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two tasks: • narrative/ imaginative</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• argument/ letter (including small group discussion)</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL TESTING TIME</strong></td>
<td>8 hours and 20 minutes</td>
<td>7 hours and 15 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 9.1 Overview of Common Tasks**

Survey Procedures Mapping Literacy Achievement
**Writing**

Students completed two tasks designed to assess two purposes for writing:

- telling a story to entertain; and
- presenting an argument to convince a reader.

Year 3 students wrote an adventure story based on a legendary creature, and a letter to a magazine giving their opinion about whether or not birds should be kept in cages. Year 5 students wrote a narrative based on a series of pictures, and a piece giving their opinion about ‘kids and money’, based on a series of comments made by adults.

Students were required to demonstrate the ways in which written text is used to communicate meaning through:

- content (the quality of thought and sense of purpose of the writing); and
- language control (the control of the elements of language such as sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and overall form of the piece).

**Reading**

Students read a collection of passages presented in magazine form. A range of text types sampled the range of reading purposes:

- narrative and poetry texts for literary experience;
- reports, scientific texts, and interviews for information retrieval; and
- procedural text for understanding how to perform a task.

In completing short response and multiple-choice questions, students were asked to:

- form initial understandings of text, including retrieving information (eg ‘Why did the man tell his son not to fly too close to the sun?’; ‘What does the text say about the size of the radio telescopes at Parkes, Australia?’) and, at Year 3, understanding steps in a procedure (eg ‘Would the pop up card still work if you did Step 7 before Step 6?’);
- reflect on themes, ideas and points of view expressed in text (eg ‘Does the writer think the mosquito is lovely? Explain your answer.’);
- develop individual interpretations of text (eg ‘Why do you think an iguana has spines on its back?’; ‘Do you think this is a true story? Explain your answer.’); and
- reflect on the construction of text, including language conventions (eg ‘The article on radio telescopes says in this way astronomers can ‘see’ what is happening in space. Why is the word ‘see’ in inverted commas?’) and elements of the writer’s craft (eg ‘Why is the article written in this style?’, ‘Why are some of the words written with capital letters and exclamation marks?’).

**Viewing**

Year 3 students viewed a narrative text, primarily for literary experience. In completing short-response and multiple-choice questions, they were asked to:

- form initial understandings of text (eg ‘In the forest it was mother owl’s job to...’);
- reflect on themes, ideas and points of view expressed in text (eg ‘According to the film, mosquitoes buzz in people’s ears because...’);
- develop individual interpretations of text (eg ‘In this story, does Mosquito ever get punished for all the trouble she has caused? Explain your answer.’); and
- appreciate elements of the writer’s craft (eg ‘Why does the storyteller repeat himself when he says, “Mother owl was so sad, so sad, so sad”?’, ‘List three ways that the film makers have made Python seem scary.’).
Year 5 students viewed three texts: a narrative, primarily for literary experience, a documentary for information retrieval, and a procedural text, to gain an understanding of how to perform a task. Short-response and multiple-choice questions required students to demonstrate greater critical stance in relation to the text than at Year 3. For example:

• with narrative text: ‘These stills are from the last two scenes. Imagine that the film makers were discussing which scene should end the film. Write an argument for each film maker.’
• with documentary text: ‘Choose one of the locations where this program was filmed and explain how you think it adds to the story of Possum’s life.’
• with procedural text: ‘The makers of a new computer game want to advertise during this show. Why do you think they want to advertise their product during this show?’

**Speaking**

Students completed two tasks designed to assess two purposes for spoken communication:

• telling a story or poem to entertain; and
• offering an opinion to convince a listener.

Year 3 students retold their favourite narrative, and reviewed a character from the central video. Year 5 students talked about their favourite TV show and discussed a poem in small groups in preparation for individual presentation and commentary.

Individual presentations required students to consider the ways in which spoken text is used to communicate meaning through:

• content of presentation (quality of ideas and ability to justify opinions); and
• performance elements (awareness of audience and ability to engage audience).

**Listening**

Students listened to a selection of spoken texts on audio-tape (a discussion, an interview and a series of directions at Year 3, and a series of rap advertisements and an interview at Year 5). The texts sampled two listening purposes:

• listening for information; and
• listening to follow directions (Year 3 only).

In completing short-response questions, students were asked to:

• form initial understandings of text, including retrieving information (eg ‘This is a description of a day on location. Tick the things Marzena does before breakfast.’, ‘When was it safe for Aunty Iris to go swimming?’); and
• reflect on themes, ideas and points of view expressed in text (eg ‘Do you think Aunty Iris and her friends believed in the Bunyip? Explain your answer.’, ‘Grandma is talking in one ad and Grandpa is talking in the other. What is the other main difference between the two ads?’).

Year 3 students also were asked to:

• reflect on the ways in which people interact when listening and speaking (eg ‘What is different about the way the children speak when the teacher is with them?’); and
• follow directions (eg ‘Draw a pile of shells in the middle of the set design plan.’).

Year 5 students also were asked to:

• reflect on the construction of text, including elements of the writer’s craft (eg ‘Do you think it was a good idea to use children to make these ads? Explain your answer.’, ‘What sound effects are used in the Grandpa ad to create the mood?’).
### 9.2 Best Work

Best work assessments were based on samples of student work completed under normal classroom conditions, in Writing and Speaking. Teachers were asked to collect four samples of writing, one of which was to include draft work as well as final version, from four specified categories, and two samples of speaking performances from three specified categories.

Categories of student work in Writing and Speaking were developed, within the profile framework, to assess different purposes for constructing text.

#### Writing Specifications

Teachers were asked to collect work samples to represent each of the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Reflective/Discursive</td>
<td>A personal narrative, an autobiographical piece or an argumentative response to a relevant issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Imaginative</td>
<td>An imaginative narrative, poem or play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Learning Area Other than English (e.g. Science, Mathematics, Studies of Society and the Environment)</td>
<td>A report or procedural piece e.g. a science experiment, a report on a group activity in mathematics, an individual project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Response to Viewed or Written text</td>
<td>A book or film review, reflective comments on a book or film</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers were asked to include two samples of speaking performances/presentations:

- a reflective/discursive piece;
- one other piece from the chart below.

The performances could be represented by records kept by the teacher when the presentations were assessed, or they could take the form of a video or audio recording.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Area</th>
<th>Sample Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Reflective/Discursive</td>
<td>A performance/presentation of a personal narrative, an autobiographical piece or an argumentative response to a relevant issue. Examples: morning talk, debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Imaginative</td>
<td>A performance/presentation of an imaginative narrative, poem or play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Learning Area Other than English (eg Science, Mathematics, Studies of Society and the Environment)</td>
<td>A performance/presentation of a report or a procedural piece. Examples: a science experiment, a report on a group activity in mathematics, an individual project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To provide reliable measures of literacy achievements, teachers assessed students’ performances on the common tasks and their best work samples using detailed assessment guides. Trained external assessors worked with teachers to ensure a common understanding of the criteria for assessment. To maximise comparability across teachers and schools, assessments were made collaboratively by teachers and external assessors. To further ensure comparability across classes, a central sampling of student work was undertaken. This allowed the remarking of students’ work if some teachers were not applying the assessment criteria and standards in the same way as other teachers (for example if some teachers’ assessments were found to be unusually harsh).

10.1 Marking Guides

Participating teachers were given detailed guides to the assessment of student work. These guides included annotated samples of student work where appropriate.

In the case of reading, viewing, and listening, assessment guides included guides to the scoring of multiple-choice and short-response questions. Teachers judged each student’s response against the provided guide. Where short-response questions were not scored dichotomously, teacher judgement was particularly important. Three examples from the Year 3 Viewing guide are shown below.

Example 1: multiple-choice question:
According to the film, mosquitos buzz in people’s ears because
✓ they feel guilty.
✓ they are hungry.
✓ they like to annoy people.
✓ they like to talk to people.

Example 2: short-response question – dichotomously scored:
In the forest it was Mother Owl’s job to -----
1 wake the sun
0 look after her babies

Example 3: short-response question – non-dichotomous:
Why does the story start with the sun rising?
2 shows understanding of sun’s central role in story
eg Because it’s all about how the sun doesn’t rise later on.
   So you know what owl does.
1 refers to use as a general ‘beginning’
   eg Because it’s the beginning of the story.
   It’s the start of the day.
0 other reason or no explanation
   eg to give the story interesting pictures
It should be noted that reading, viewing, and listening responses were assessed for students’ understanding, not for spelling, punctuation, or grammar. In the case of reading prediction, viewing, and listening, teachers were allowed to read the questions to students. In the case of ‘common task’ writing, the assessment guides provided teachers with described levels of performance against which to judge students’ work. Separate rating levels for ‘Content’ (quality of thought and sense of purpose) and ‘Language’ (control of the elements of language, including sentence structure, spelling and punctuation) were supported by annotated samples of student work. The guide to Level 2 (Language) is shown opposite with an example of student writing given a Level 2 rating.

For the assessment of ‘best work’ writing, teachers used similar rating levels. For each category of best work, teachers were given a general level description, a category-specific Content guide, and a Language guide. The guide to Level 2 for reflective/discursive writing is shown below. Guides were accompanied by annotated samples of student work.

Excerpt from Writing (Best Work) Assessment Guide

Level 2 Reflective/discursive category

**Level Statement:**
Writing contains two or more related ideas with little development or shape. It may be repetitive, contain irrelevant details or stray from the task.

**Content:**
Brief, or long and disjointed.
Relies on assertion rather than argument.

**Language:**
Writing can be readily interpreted by others
Generally readable.
High frequency words are spelled correctly; other spelling attempted using known spelling patterns.
Simple conjunctions such as ‘and’ and ‘but’ are used.
Simple, sometimes repetitive sentence structure.

For the assessment of ‘common task’ speaking, teachers were given a set of described rating levels against which to make on-the-spot assessments. Separate rating levels were provided for ‘Content’ (understanding of ideas and ability to justify opinions) and ‘Performance’ (awareness of audience, and ability to engage audience). The guide to Level 4 (Content and Performance) for one of the Year 3 speaking tasks is shown in the first example on page 272.
Excerpt from Writing (Common Task) Assessment Guide

Level 2 Language

The writing uses basic conventions. It is constructed of simple sentences using some linking words, and uses common punctuation such as capital letters and full stops some or all of the time. High frequency words are usually spelled correctly. Writing can be interpreted by others.

That is

- simple sentence forms
- common punctuation
- correct spelling of high frequency words
- generally readable handwriting.

---

**Should Birds Be Kept in Cages?**

*Content/Context 2
Language 2*

Dear Sticky,

I think that birds should be kept in cages (because) so you can see it is yours. But I would not like it if I think that it is better for them to be free and if you feed a bird, you really like put something to show it's yours such as a coloured tag. A bad thing that they put on coat (put on the birds foot by for now sticky from N)

Judging and Recording
Teachers were given similar rating levels for use in judging ‘best work’ records of speaking performances. For each best work category, teachers were given a category-specific guide to the assessment of ‘Content’. The ‘Performance’ rating levels were the same as for the common tasks. Assessment guides were accompanied by annotated samples of student work. The guide to Level 4 for the ‘Reflective/discursive’ category is shown below.

Excerpt from Speaking (Best Work) Assessment Guide
Level 4 Reflective/discursive category

**Level Statement:**
Consistent attempts are made to justify opinions/assertions and include reasoned arguments.
Students may begin to experiment with relevant language and/or organisational elements of genre/topic.
Presentation is well organised.

**Content:**
Presents a strong point of view.
Offers some considered reasons or arguments.

**Performance:**
Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation), with good natural expression
AND
has a good, consistent sense of audience.

---

Excerpt from Speaking (Common Task) Assessment Guide
Level 4 Content and Performance

**Content:**
Presents a strong point of view about the characters or their favourite character.
Justifies opinion beyond narrative interpretation. (I like python because of his power.)

**Performance:**
Speaks clearly and articulately (allowing for some hesitation), with good natural expression
AND
has a good, consistent sense of audience.
10.2 EXTERNAL ASSESSOR TRAINING

To ensure a common understanding of the criteria for assessment, and to maximise comparability across teachers and schools, trained external assessors worked collaboratively with teachers in the assessment of students’ literacy achievements.

A ‘train the trainer’ model was used. External assessors were trained at a national professional development workshop and they, in turn, trained all participating teachers at regional workshops.

The Professional Development/Training Sub-committee (Figure 6.1) agreed that:

- the key role of external assessors was to enhance the reliability of the data from the Survey by training and supporting participating teachers to assess students’ achievements, with team building seen as a vital component in this process;
- central training for the external assessors was to model the two-day regional training programs for participating teachers; and
- both national and regional programs were to be designed so that broader contextual issues could be integrated into marker training.

One hundred external assessors attended a three-day intensive, national professional development workshop in July 1996. External assessors were experienced teachers or literacy consultants selected from State and system level. They were drawn from States and Territories and government and non-government schools in appropriate ratio.

Workshop training ensured that assessors:

- understood the purpose of the Survey and its methodology;
- appreciated their central role in maximising the reliability of Survey data;
- were familiar with all Survey materials;
- were confident in use of the assessment criteria; and
- understood the significance of involvement in the Survey in terms of professional development for participating teachers.

Workshop sessions, led by ACER staff who had developed the Survey tasks and assessment guides, were structured around:

- familiarisation with materials (including administration instructions, stimulus materials, answer booklets, assessment guides, and record sheets);
- use of materials and assessment of work samples (including students’ written responses to reading, viewing, listening and writing tasks, and videotaped speaking responses); and
- discussion of classroom management implications.

External assessors received three days of teacher relief to attend the national workshop, two days’ relief to train the participating teachers and up to ten days’ relief to support participating teachers (one day for each teacher in the team).

10.3 TEACHER TRAINING

All 900 participating teachers attended a two-day State/Territory professional development workshop modelled on the national workshop. These workshops were delivered by external assessors who provided teachers with training handbooks for ‘hands-on’ practice in assessing reading, writing, listening, and viewing work samples, and using assessment guides and record sheets. In the case of speaking assessment, teachers viewed a series of videotaped speaking performances. After several guided practice sessions, teachers assessed three performances without assistance. Teachers’
ratings of these performances were collected for analysis.

Two excerpts from the teacher training handbook are shown below. The first, from the introductory section of the handbook, shows the structure of the training sessions; the second illustrates the way in which main points for each of the reading, viewing speaking, listening and writing sections were emphasised.

Excerpt from teacher training handbook: Structure of Training Sessions

1 Presentation of materials
   A vital part of this training is the opportunity to become familiar with the stimulus and we plan to view, read and listen to everything. This will also make the use of the marking guides and the marking of student work more meaningful. We will be focussing on various aspects of the administration, or the materials, in various sessions to avoid repetition.

2 Use of materials and assessment of work samples
   This will involve hands-on assessment of work samples using the relevant marking guides and score sheets. As well as familiarising assessors with materials this will also allow them the opportunity to discuss problems and clarify issues.

3 Classroom management implications
   Once assessors are aware of what each testing session involves with regard to general administration they will be in a position to discuss the classroom management implications. There will be time allocated in each session for a discussion about classroom management.

4 State training implications
   The training sessions for external assessors are designed to be a model for the state training sessions. Work samples that are used to illustrate points in these sessions have been included in the Teacher Training Handbook so you can use them at your own state training sessions. There will be time allocated in each session to consider any problems you feel you might have in reproducing the sessions.

5 Plenary session
   Each session will allow time at the end for groups to report back, or for general discussion on a particular issue. We would also like to include a short session at the beginning of each day to address any particular concerns that have arisen once people have had time to sleep on them.

Excerpt from teacher training handbook: Viewing Main Points

MAIN POINTS

1 Do the viewing task before any of the other common tasks.
2 Read questions aloud to students before they view the tape.
3 Student answer booklets must always be closed while students are watching the tape.
4 Questions may be re-read to the class or individual students.
5 No help may be given with answers or the interpretation of the questions.
6 There is no need to rewind the tape; any repeated sections are contained within the tape.
7 Question 16 is on a separate page and should be collected before students watch the tape again.
8 There is no sound on the segment of the tape that students watch before they answer question 16.
Teachers received two days’ relief payment to undertake training at the regional level and up to three days’ additional relief (or payment in lieu) to make assessments of their ten students.

10.4 Collaborative Marking

Each external assessor worked collaboratively with up to ten teachers over a six-week period. Teachers were able to call by telephone, or to fax for advice during the Survey period. External assessors arranged also to spend one full day with each of their ten teachers. This time (for which teachers were given classroom release) allowed the collaborative marking of students’ responses to the common tasks and assessment of their best work samples. Because writing and speaking assessments required the most judgement, it was suggested that teachers and external assessors focus their shared time on these aspects of literacy. In cases where teachers were unsure about the assessment of common task speaking, external assessors assisted.

10.5 Teachers’ Judgements of Student Writing

Teachers judged the quality of student writing and assigned each piece of work a rating from Level 1 to Level 5. These five levels were constructed to correspond to Levels 1 to 5 of the English profile for Australian schools. Year 3 teachers were given Levels 1 to 4 only; Year 5 teachers were given Levels 2 to 5.

Year 3 teachers made twelve separate assessments: four on common task writing, and eight on best work samples. The two common tasks completed by Year 3 students were ‘Legendary Creatures’, a piece of narrative (N) writing, and ‘Should birds be kept in cages?’, a piece of argumentative (A) writing. Teachers rated each of these pieces according to its content (C) and control of language (L), resulting in four separate ratings. The percentages of Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 ratings assigned by teachers are shown in Table 10.1.

A further eight ratings were made of students’ best work. The four pieces of best work, reflective/discursive (R), imaginative (I), work from a learning area other than English (O), and written response to a read or viewed text (V) were each rated for content (C) and control of language (L). The percentages of Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 ratings assigned by teachers are shown in Table 10.2.
It can be seen from these two tables that teachers tended to assign higher ratings to samples of best work than to work completed under common task conditions.

Year 5 teachers also made twelve separate assessments: four on common task writing, and eight on best work samples. The two common tasks completed by Year 5 students were ‘The Box’, a piece of narrative (N) writing, and ‘Kids and Money’, a piece of argumentative (A) writing. Teachers rated each of these pieces according to its content (C) and control of language (L), resulting in four separate ratings. The percentages of Level 2, Level 3, Level 4 and Level 5 ratings assigned by teachers are shown in Table 10.3.

A further eight ratings were made of students’ best work. The four pieces of best work, reflective/discursive (R), imaginative (I), work from a learning area other than English (O), and written response to a read of viewed text (V) were each rated for content (C) and control of language (L). The percentages of Level 2, Level 3, Level 4 and Level 5 ratings assigned by teachers are shown in Table 10.4.
It can be seen from these two tables that Year 5 teachers also tended to assign higher ratings to samples of best work than to work completed under common task conditions.

### 10.6 Teachers’ Judgements of Students’ Speaking

Teachers judged the quality of students’ speaking performances and assigned each presentation a rating from Level 1 to Level 5. These five levels were constructed to correspond to Levels 1 to 5 of the English profile for Australian schools. Year 3 teachers were given Levels 1 to 4 only in their assessment guides; Year 5 teachers were given Levels 2 to 5.

Year 3 teachers made eight separate assessments. The two common tasks completed by Year 3 students were ‘Retell’, a narrative (N) presentation, and ‘Character review’, an opinionative (O) presentation. Teachers rated each of these presentations according to its content (C) and performance (P), resulting in four separate ratings. The percentages of Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4 ratings assigned by Year 3 teachers are shown in Table 10.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NC</th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>OC</th>
<th>OP</th>
<th>av.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be seen from these tables that teachers gave slightly higher ratings to students’ narrative (N) presentations than to their opinionative (O) presentations. Year 3 teachers’ average ratings of common task speaking performances were similar to their average ratings of best work speaking.

Year 5 teachers also made eight separate assessments: four on common tasks, and four on best work samples. The two common tasks completed by Year 5 students were ‘My favourite TV show’, an opinionative (O) presentation, and ‘Hungry burglar’, a predominantly narrative (N) presentation. Teachers rated each of these presentations according to its content (C) and performance (P), resulting in four separate ratings. The percentages of Level 2, Level 3, Level 4 and Level 5 ratings assigned by teachers are shown in Table 10.7.

Year 5 teachers also made a further four ratings of students’ best work. The two pieces of best work, reflective/discursive (R), and imaginative or learning area other than English (IE) were rated for content (C) and performance (P). The percentages of Level 2, Level 3, Level 4 and Level 5 ratings assigned by teachers are shown in Table 10.8.
It can be seen from these tables that Year 5 teachers’ average ratings of common task speaking performances were similar to their average ratings of best work speaking.

10.7 Sample Marking and Reliability

To ensure comparability across classes, a central sampling of data was undertaken. Reading, viewing, and listening common tasks were sample marked. Because common task speaking performances were assessed on-the-spot by teachers and external assessors, sample marking was not possible. An initial investigation of common task and best work writing was completed.

Reading, viewing, and listening

Sample marking of reading, viewing, and listening common tasks was undertaken to see whether teachers were consistent with each other in their interpretation of the provided marking guides.

The method used for sample marking did not attempt to identify individual teachers who might not have been consistent with other teachers, but focused instead on identifying tasks that appeared to be generally problematic for teachers. Because students completed many tasks in their own words, the important question was whether teachers were consistent with each other in the interpretation and assessment of students’ responses to each task.

Sample marking proceeded as follows:

1. Three ACER staff, who had developed the tasks and assessment guides, blind marked a set of randomly selected papers. Their assessments of each question were checked for consistency, as a baseline against which to judge the consistency of teachers’ assessments.

2. The three staff then independently assessed a second, larger set of randomly selected papers. Discrepancies between ACER assessments and teacher assessments for each question were tallied. Where discrepancies were high for particular questions, student responses were analysed carefully and assessment guides refined to include a broader range of student responses.

3. A small team of trained ACER markers, under the supervision of a group of external assessors for the Survey, then checked these ‘problematic’ questions on every paper, making changes to ensure that all students’ responses to these questions were assessed in the same way.
The result of this process was that almost all teacher assessments were left unchanged. In Year 5 reading, for example, only two questions were remarked, and on these, 95% of teachers’ assessments were unchanged. In viewing and listening, where teachers are less experienced in the assessment of student work, and where the development of assessment procedures is less refined than for reading and writing, a larger number of questions were remarked (14 viewing questions and 17 listening questions across the two Year levels). Despite the high number of questions checked, most teachers’ assessments remained unchanged.

Table 10.9 shows the percentages of Year 3 and Year 5 teachers’ assessments, for each of reading, viewing, and listening, that remained unchanged after the sample marking procedure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th></th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td>99.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WRITING**

An initial examination of common task writing scripts was completed to see whether teachers were assessing writing scripts in the same way. Research suggests that some markers of student writing can be unusually harsh or unusually lenient in their judgement of students’ work.

The procedure for examining scripts was as follows:

1. Three ACER staff, who had developed the writing tasks and assessment guides, blind marked a set of randomly selected papers. Their assessments were checked for consistency, as a baseline against which to judge the consistency of teachers’ assessments. Given that perfect agreement between markers is unlikely, it was assumed that an ‘ideal’ degree of consistency against which to judge teachers’ assessments would be the consistency of markers who were most familiar with the guides; that is, trained markers who had developed the guides.

2. The three staff then independently assessed a second, larger set of randomly selected papers. Discrepancies between ACER assessments and teachers’ assessments for each writing task were tallied.

3. A statistical procedure also was used to identify schools in which students had been given unusually high or unusually low writing assessments.

Both procedures (the remarking of randomly selected scripts, and the remarking of scripts from schools with unusually high or unusually low writing assessments) suggested a reasonable level of consistency among teachers. It was recognised that the identification of individual teachers who were harsher or more lenient than their colleagues would
require the remarking of some work from all teachers. This was an unrealistic task in the


time available and so it was decided to enter and analyse all teachers’ writing


asessments as received.

**FURTHER EVIDENCE: WRITING**

In the 1995 trial for the Survey, student writing was assessed by teachers and external


assessors working together. In the trial, writing was collected and assessed at Years 3, 5


and 10. Each piece of writing was assessed separately on a number of criteria as well as


being given an ‘on-balance’ assessment.


A sample of student writing was drawn for reassessment by three members of ACER’s


project team (A, B and C). These assessors worked independently and without


knowledge of teachers’/external assessors’ judgements of the sampled writing. Each


piece of sampled work was assessed by two of the three assessors.


The resulting assessments allowed levels of agreement to be investigated between the two


ACER assessors judging each piece of writing and between each ACER assessor and the


teacher/assessors who judged that piece. Levels of agreement were investigated for each


criterion, including the ‘on-balance’ judgement, and also for a total writing score obtained


by summing across the criteria for each piece. Figure 10.1 shows the correlations among


all paired assessors at the level of the total score. These correlations have been ordered


from highest to lowest.


From Figure 10.1 it can be seen that the highest correlations occurred among the three


ACER assessors A, B and C. Reasonably high correlations occurred between teachers and


ACER assessors on some writing tasks.


An analysis of levels of assessor agreement on each of the assessment criteria is shown in


Tables 10.10 to 10.14. This analysis suggested ways of further increasing levels of inter-


rater reliability. For example, Table 10.10, and to a lesser extent Table 10.11, showed


relatively low levels of agreement among assessors on handwriting, and so the


assessment of handwriting was not included in the 1996 Survey.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corr.</th>
<th>Assessors</th>
<th>Writing tasks / Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.99</td>
<td>B-C</td>
<td>10 L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.94</td>
<td>B-C</td>
<td>10 N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.93</td>
<td>A-C</td>
<td>3 R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.93</td>
<td>A-C</td>
<td>3 N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.93</td>
<td>A-B</td>
<td>5 TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.91</td>
<td>A-B</td>
<td>5 TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.90</td>
<td>teachers-A</td>
<td>5 TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.89</td>
<td>teachers-C</td>
<td>3 R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.88</td>
<td>teachers-A</td>
<td>5 TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.87</td>
<td>A-B</td>
<td>5 LTR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.87</td>
<td>teachers-C</td>
<td>3 N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.83</td>
<td>teachers-A</td>
<td>3 R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.83</td>
<td>teachers-B</td>
<td>10 L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.81</td>
<td>teachers-C</td>
<td>10 L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.80</td>
<td>teachers-A</td>
<td>5 LTR</td>
</tr>
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<td>.79</td>
<td>teachers-A</td>
<td>3 N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.72</td>
<td>teachers-B</td>
<td>5 TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.72</td>
<td>teachers-B</td>
<td>5 LTR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.69</td>
<td>teachers-B</td>
<td>10 N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.67</td>
<td>teachers-B</td>
<td>5 TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.61</td>
<td>teachers-C</td>
<td>10 N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 10.1** Correlations between assessments of writing
### Table 10.10 Correlations between assessors (Year 3 Narrative Writing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Handwriting</td>
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<td>.80</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
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<td>.70</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence control</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of writing</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject matter</td>
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<td>.82</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose &amp; audience</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-balance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 10.11 Correlations between assessors (Year 3 Recount Writing)

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<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
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<th>C</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handwriting</td>
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<td>.39</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>.43</td>
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<td>.83</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.86</td>
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<td>.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
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<td>.72</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence control</td>
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<td>.89</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text organisation</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose &amp; audience</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-balance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 10.12 Correlations between assessors (Year 5 ‘Taking Care’)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content/context</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
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<td>.65</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-balance</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 10.13 Correlations between assessors (Year 5 ‘Television’)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content/context</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-balance</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Table 10.14 Correlations between assessors (Year 5 ‘Letter’)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
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<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content/context</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-balance</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Central marking of all common task writing scripts and a sample of best work scripts (which were accompanied by a draft) was undertaken to estimate students’ levels of spelling achievement. A single marking guide which described five levels of spelling achievement was used.

The procedure for the initial training of markers was as follows:

1. Markers viewed and discussed annotated copies of students’ work, at each level of spelling achievement and from both Year levels, with ACER staff.
2. Markers were given scripts, which had been assessed by ACER staff, to discuss with a partner. If they did not agree with the assessment they discussed their assessments with ACER staff.
3. Markers assessed a series of scripts discussing borderline scripts with colleagues. Any scripts that caused doubt were referred to ACER staff.

Because research suggests that some markers of student writing can be unusually harsh or lenient in their judgement, procedures for monitoring markers’ assessments were followed:

1. At the end of the first day of marking, ACER staff checked a randomly selected set of each marker’s papers.
2. Where a marker appeared to be unusually harsh or lenient in their judgement, their scripts were discussed before the next day’s marking began. Four of thirteen markers had difficulty with one section of the guide (e.g. distinguishing between Level 3 and Level 4 spelling achievement).
3. At the end of the second day ACER staff blind marked a randomly selected set of papers.
A separate study of the reliability of the thirteen markers’ assessments was undertaken. A random selection of a set of ten Year 3 scripts and a set of ten Year 5 scripts from each marker was made. These 260 scripts were blind marked by the ACER staff member who had developed the spelling assessment guides. The assessments of the ACER staff member (columns) and of the team of trained markers (rows) are compared in Table 10.15.

From Table 10.15 it can be seen that the ACER staff member agreed with the assessments made by the trained markers on most (85%) of scripts. Where there were disagreements, these differences were never greater than one Level on the five-level scale. This level of agreement is consistent with the level commonly found in ratings of student writing and indicates that the spelling scale has provided a useful basis for capturing levels of spelling competence in student writing.
The steps in the construction of literacy achievement measures for the National School English Literacy Survey were:

1. selecting an assessment framework (the reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing outcomes of the English profile for Australian schools) to guide the collection and reporting of literacy achievement data;
2. selecting and developing a set of assessment methods (‘common tasks’ and ‘best work’ samples) as sources of evidence about students’ levels of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing achievements;
3. constructing a set of assessment guides for judging and recording students’ written responses, speaking performances, and best work samples; and
4. bringing together a teacher’s judgements to make an estimate of a student’s level of achievement in each of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing.

This section describes the last of these four steps.

11. Estimating Achievement Levels

Students’ estimated levels of literacy achievement have been reported on five scales: one for each of the five aspects of literacy assessed in the Survey. Each scale describes increasing achievement in an area of literacy. Students’ levels of achievement on these scales have been estimated from teachers’ recorded judgements of students’ performances and work.

Each reporting scale has been constructed to allow Year 3 and Year 5 students’ achievements to be expressed in the same metric and to be compared. The procedure used for writing and speaking relied on Year 3 and Year 5 teachers’ use of the same rating scales in the assessment of students’ work and performances. Year 3 teachers were asked to rate student work against provided scales (each from Level 1 to Level 4). Year 5 teachers also were asked to rate student work against provided scales (each from Level 2 to Level 5). On these scales, Levels 2, 3 and 4 were common. Teachers’ uses of these scales were analysed to establish whether the common rating points appeared to have been interpreted in the same way by Year 3 and Year 5 teachers.

The procedure used to construct the scales for reading, listening, and viewing involved administering the reading, listening and viewing common tasks to Year 4 students in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia in a separate ‘equating’ study. In the equating study, 350 Year 4 students completed the Year 3 and Year 5 reading common tasks, 390 students completed the viewing common tasks, and 390 students completed the listening common tasks. The performances of these students were used to establish the relative difficulties of the Year 3 and Year 5 tasks in each of these three aspects of literacy.
The intention in collecting samples of student writing completed under controlled conditions (common writing tasks) and from day-to-day classroom work (best work in writing), and in providing overlapping rating scales for use at Year 3 and Year 5, was to estimate individuals’ levels of writing achievement on a single Writing (Content) scale and a single Writing (Language) scale. Whether this is possible depends on the extent to which Year 3 teachers interpreted and used the provided rating scale in the same way as Year 5 teachers.

To investigate the consistency of teachers’ interpretations of the rating levels, estimates were obtained of rating ‘thresholds’ for Year 3 and Year 5 teachers. These are shown in Figures 11.1 and 11.2. A ‘threshold’ is the level of writing achievement above which teachers tend to assign a particular rating. In other words, a threshold is a standard that teachers apply. The estimated threshold IC.4, for example, marks the difficulty of achieving a Level 4 for content (C) in imaginative (I) writing.

Figure 11.1 was constructed by first calibrating Year 3 and Year 5 common task writing separately using the Rasch Partial Credit Model (see Masters, 1982; Wright and Masters, 1982). The Year 3 and Year 5 calibrations were then aligned by adding a constant to the Year 5 estimates so that the twelve common thresholds had the same mean in the Year 5 and Year 3 analyses.

To obtain Figure 11.2, the Year 3 and Year 5 best work writing samples were calibrated separately. The mean of the threshold estimates for Year 3 best work was then set at the mean of the threshold estimates for Year 3 common task writing; and the mean of the Year 5 best work thresholds was set at the mean of the Year 5 common task thresholds. It can be seen from Figures 11.1 and 11.2 that there was some tendency for the best work estimates to be less dispersed than the common task estimates.

Figures 11.1 and 11.2 show that Year 3 and Year 5 teachers applied very similar interpretations of Levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 when rating student writing. They applied similar standards when rating narrative and argumentative writing, when rating common task writing and best work writing, and between Year 3 and Year 5. The results of these analyses support the intention to express levels of Year 3 and Year 5 writing on a single Writing (Content) scale and a single Writing (Language) scale.

It can be seen from Figure 11.1 that AL.5 and AC.5 are above NL.5 and NC.5 on the writing scale, indicating that students found it more difficult to achieve a rating of Level 5 on the argumentative writing task (Kids and Money) than on the narrative writing task (The Box). At both Year 3 and Year 5, students tend to have performed less well on argumentative writing than on narrative writing.

In best work writing, students experienced most difficulty writing about read or viewed text (V) and performed best in the areas of reflective (R) and imaginative (I) writing.
FIGURE 11.1  THRESHOLD ESTIMATES FOR COMMON TASK WRITING
Figure 11.2 Threshold estimates for best work writing
Having established that Year 3 and Year 5 teachers appear to have used the provided rating levels in the same way, an estimate was next made of the percentage of students working in each profile Level in writing. The method used to make these estimates is illustrated in the Table 11.1, which shows results for Year 3 common task writing.

 Teachers made four ratings of each student’s common task writing (NC, NL, AC, AL). These ratings were made of content (C) and language (L) for the piece of narrative writing (N) and the piece of argumentative writing (A). Between 9.4% and 14.7% of students received the highest possible (Level 4) rating on each of these four assessments.

To estimate the percentage of students at each Level, each student’s four ratings were averaged and the average used to allocate that student to a Level. A student receiving the ratings (4,4,3,3) had an average rating of 3.5 and was considered to be working in Level 4. In other words, for the purposes of indicating approximate percentages of students ‘working in’ Writing and Speaking profile levels, students were considered to be working in a level if at least 50% of the ratings given by teachers corresponded to that level. It can be seen from the above table that 2.9% of students received a Level 4 rating on all four common task writing assessments (4 4 4 4), and 12.4% of students were estimated to be ‘working in Level 4’.

For reporting purposes, the approximate percentage of students working in each level has been calculated (ie approximately 5%, 35%, 50%, and 10% of Year 3 students working in Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 for writing). These percentages provide an indication of students working in each level only. For the purposes of monitoring levels of Year 3 Writing achievement over time, the mean and standard deviation (or percentile points on the student distribution) provide a more reliable basis for reporting.

### Table 11.1 Results for Year 3 common task writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>NC</th>
<th>NL</th>
<th>AC</th>
<th>AL</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>4 4 4 4</td>
<td>2.9 12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>3.25 3 3 3</td>
<td>7.4 47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>2.25 2 2 2</td>
<td>12.7 34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1.25 1 1 1</td>
<td>1.4 5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As for writing, the intention in observing students’ speaking under controlled conditions (common speaking tasks) as well as in day-to-day classroom work (best work in speaking), and in providing overlapping rating scales for use at Year 3 and Year 5, was to estimate individuals’ levels of speaking achievement on a single Speaking scale. Whether this is possible depends on the extent to which Year 3 and Year 5 teachers interpreted and used the provided rating scales in the same way.

To investigate the consistency of teachers’ interpretations of the rating levels, estimates were obtained of rating ‘thresholds’ for Year 3 and Year 5 teachers. These are shown in Figures 11.3 and 11.4. A ‘threshold’ is the level of speaking achievement above which teachers tend to assign a particular rating. In other words, a threshold is a standard which teachers apply. The estimated threshold NP.4, for example, marks the difficulty of achieving a Level 4 for Performance (P) in the narrative (N) speaking task.

Figure 11.3 was constructed by first calibrating Year 3 and Year 5 common task speaking separately using the Rasch Partial Credit Model. The Year 3 and Year 5 calibrations were then aligned by adding a constant to the Year 5 estimates so that the twelve common thresholds had the same mean in the Year 5 and Year 3 analyses.

To obtain Figure 11.4, the Year 3 and Year 5 best work speaking samples were calibrated separately. The mean of the threshold estimates for Year 3 best work was then set at the mean of the threshold estimates for Year 3 common task speaking; and the mean of the Year 5 best work thresholds was set at the mean of the Year 5 common task thresholds. It can be seen from Figures 11.3 and 11.4 that there was a tendency—particularly at Year 5—for the best work estimates to be less dispersed than the common task estimates.

Figures 11.3 and 11.4 show that Year 3 and Year 5 teachers applied similar interpretations of Levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 when rating student speaking. They applied similar standards when rating different kinds of speaking evidence, and between Year 3 and Year 5. The results of these analyses support the intention to express levels of Year 3 and Year 5 speaking on a single speaking scale.
Figure 11.3  Threshold estimates for common task speaking
Figure 11.4 Threshold Estimates for Best Work Speaking
Estimates of students’ levels of speaking achievement were obtained by first averaging their ratings on the speaking common tasks and the speaking best work samples, and using these averages to assign students to levels.

11.4 Reading, Listening, Viewing

The reporting scales for reading, listening, and viewing were constructed by statistically calibrating the tasks for each of these aspects of literacy achievement separately using the Rasch (or one-parameter logistic) item response model. Year 3 and Year 5 tasks were calibrated separately, and then brought to the same scale using the results of the equating study.

The outcome addressed by each task was then identified. The range of item calibrations associated with outcomes from each profile level provided an indication of the location of that level on the reporting scale.

The statistical analysis also provided an estimated location for each score on each reporting scale (see estimates for the Year 3 reading scores in Figure 11.5). These estimates provide an on-balance indication of students’ levels of achievement on each strand. Levels of achievement were estimated in this way on the reading, listening, and viewing scales.

In Figure 11.5, students scoring 24 or above were considered to be ‘working in’ Level 4. These students have at least a 50% chance of successfully completing at least some Level 4 tasks. (Students with scores of 27 or 28 have more than a 50% chance of completing the easier Level 4 tasks, and a 50% chance of completing some harder Level 4 tasks).
Figure 11.5 Year 3 reading scores and approximate locations of profile levels on the reading scale.
12.1 Questionnaires

Four questionnaires were developed to gather background information on students, teachers and schools:

• a Student Questionnaire completed by the student, with assistance from the class teacher where necessary;
• a Student Information Sheet, completed by class teachers;
• a Teacher Questionnaire, completed by class teachers; and
• a School Background Questionnaire, completed by school principals or their designates.

The Student Questionnaire collected information about:

• home language or languages;
• reading materials and frequency of reading;
• reading, listening, talking, writing activities and their frequency;
• time spent watching television during the week, and on weekends;
• applications of home/school computers and the frequencies of their various uses;
• homework; and
• enjoyment of reading, writing, viewing, listening and talking activities in class.

The Student Information Sheet collected information from the class teacher about each participating student’s:

• age;
• ethnic background;
• language background;
• disabilities that may require support;
• learning and/or behavioural difficulties;
• achievements in reading, viewing, writing, speaking and listening;
• exposure to special programs in English literacy;
• school attendance; and
• parent’s occupations.

The Teacher Questionnaire collected information from class teachers about their:

• gender;
• teaching experience, and qualifications (general and literacy-specific);
• class composition;
• student characteristics (with regard to literacy, and to language background); and
• classroom practices and resources.

The School Background Questionnaire collected information from principals about their schools, including:

• type of school;
• whether single sex or coeducational;
• 1996 school enrolment;
• year levels covered;
• percentage of non–English-speaking background and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background students enrolled;
• additional programs in English literacy classes; and
• provision of extra classroom support.

The Student Questionnaire and the Student Information sheet both provided data about...
the individual students who participated in the study. The Teacher Questionnaire and the School Questionnaire provided information about the schools and classrooms (there was one classroom per school) from which these students were drawn. There were two samples from which information was derived. A main sample and a special sample of Indigenous students. Characteristics of both these samples have been described elsewhere (see pages 247–252).

The data from the questionnaires were used to form variables. In some cases these variables were simply based on the responses to individual items (e.g., How often do you read books at home?) while in other cases variables were based on transformations of the responses (e.g., parents’ occupation categories were transformed onto an occupational status scale) and in other cases composite variables were formed by combining the responses to two or more closely related items.

Information from the questionnaires was used in three ways in the study:

- to identify subgroups of students such as those of other than English-speaking background;
- to provide descriptive information about students’ literacy-related activities in school and elsewhere, and about their disposition towards these activities; and
- to provide variables that formed the basis of investigations of the relationships between achievements in literacy and various home and school factors.

12.2 Subgroups of Students

The report identifies the performance of subgroups of students based on three dimensions: gender, socio-economic status, and language background. Gender (boy or girl) was based on information provided by the class teacher on the Student Information Sheet.

Socio-economic status

In this study socio-economic status was represented by the status of parents’ occupations. Teachers recorded the occupations of students’ parents on the Student Information Sheet in terms of the ten categories (plus additional categories such as home duties, unemployed) of the two-digit Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO). These were transformed into a five-category occupational status scale (actually the well-established six-point Australian National University scale but with two middle categories (tradespersons and sales/clerical) combined. Hence the scale of occupational status that was used in the analysis was as follows:

- Professional–managerial including ASCO categories 1 and 2 (e.g., doctor, lawyer, teacher, accountant, senior public servant, company director);
- Paraprofessional including ASCO categories 3 and 10 (e.g., technicians, technical officer, nurses, police as well as farmers);
- Clerical, Trades and Sales including ASCO categories 4, 5 and 6 (e.g., typists, secretaries, data processing operators, skilled tradespersons in recognised trades, sales representatives and assistants, small business or shop-keeper);
- Semi-skilled including ASCO category 7 (e.g., road and rail transport drivers, plant and machine operators); and
- Unskilled including ASCO category 8 (e.g., labourers and related workers, factory hands, construction workers, laundry workers, garbage collectors).

The value recorded as the parental occupational status for each student was the highest
status of father’s or mother’s occupation (if both were recorded) or whichever one was provided and able to be assigned a valid code. In the data recorded for subgroup performance ‘low’ corresponded to the unskilled category, middle corresponded to the clerical, trades and sales category and high corresponded to the professional–managerial category.

Parents’ occupational status was also one of the variables in the analysis of factors associated with achievements in literacy. For that purpose the ordinal values (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) were used but the results analyses were checked using the calibrated scale values (9, 12, 27, 45 and 65). There was no difference at all in the results obtained.

**LANGUAGE BACKGROUND**

Two approaches to the study of ethnic or language background differences in student outcomes are common. One is to base the classification on the countries of birth of students’ parents and the other is to base the classification on the language most often spoken at home. The former is more commonly used in studies of school retention while the latter is more commonly used in studies of achievement. In both cases it is typical to report results in two categories: English-speaking (although sometimes when birthplace is the basis this is further divided into Australian-born and other English-speaking) or other than English-speaking. The evidence is that a classification based on the language most often spoken at home results in far fewer students in the ‘other than English-speaking’ group than one based on birthplace of parents. In the present study language spoken at home was the criterion for classification into the subgroups English-speaking and other than English-speaking. On this basis some 19% of students were classified as being other than English-speaking.

**12.3 DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION**

The four questionnaires provided a great deal of information about the literacy-related activities of students in Years 3 and 5, their interests in various activities in schools and the provisions and resources used in the development of literacy in their schools. Since the data were derived from nationally representative samples of students the descriptive information provides a unique picture of education in these important areas.

The main sample was drawn as a proportionate sample without over-sampling in smaller states and school systems so there was no need to apply weighting procedures to the data. Basic descriptive statistics of central tendency (mean and median) and dispersion (standard deviations and inter-quartile range) were computed together with the frequency distribution for each variable. In order to present as much descriptive information as possible the report contains, in graphical form, the frequency distributions for the variables that are the central focus of the report. For some variables that were reported on a continuous range it was necessary to report this in categories (eg teacher experience was recorded as number of years but reported in terms of the percentage distribution across categories: 1 to 5, 6 to 10, 11 to 20, 21 to 30, more than 30 years).
series of analyses was undertaken to identify in greater detail school and student characteristics associated with literacy achievement. First, the correlations between achievement measures in writing, reading, viewing, speaking and listening and a range of student variables were examined. Second, the correlations between mean achievement scores for each class and school or teacher variables were analysed. Third, both student and school or teacher variables in a two-level analysis of overall achievements in literacy.

**STUDENT-LEVEL CORRELATIONS**

The strength of the associations between student-level variables and achievements in literacy were estimated by correlation coefficients. These coefficients were calculated separately for each strand and separately for Year 3 and Year 5. Correlation coefficients can range from 0 (no association) to 1 (perfect correspondence between the two variables). As the samples were fairly large, even small correlation coefficients were statistically significant and so attention was focused on those of larger magnitude. A guiding rule in these circumstances is to give attention to those coefficients that are greater than 0.1 and therefore associated with at least 1% of the variation in achievement.

**SCHOOL AND TEACHER FACTORS**

When there is information about characteristics of teachers and schools there are two simple approaches to preliminary analysis. One is to assign to each student the value of the variable characteristic of their class or school and conduct a mixed-level analysis of correlations. The other is to investigate the associations between school or teacher factors was based on the correlation coefficients between those factors and the mean achievement scores for the class(es) involved at each school. This is an aggregate-level analysis. In this investigation an aggregate-level analysis was conducted and the major results have been included in the report. This analysis was also used to filter the variables to be included in the multilevel analysis.

**MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS**

Some of the most important results were obtained from the application of multivariate–multilevel analyses (specifically the program HLM). These analyses were multivariate in that the statistic used to represent the association between two variables makes statistical allowance for the influence of other variables that might be related to both. Those statistics therefore give rise to inferences of the ‘other things equal’ form and can be used represent net influences of one variable on the other. They were multilevel in the sense that they included student-level and school or teacher level variables in the analysis simultaneously.

Some procedures that were followed in order to ensure stability in the results are worth noting.

First, the five achievement measures (writing, reading, viewing, speaking and listening) were combined to form a global ‘literacy’ measure for each student in the analyses. Even though the initial analyses of correlation coefficients considered each achievement measure separately, the relationships with the background variables were very similar for the five different literacy measures. A composite achievement measure was able to be formed provided that the student had a valid score on at least three of the strands.

Second, it was necessary to have a cluster of sufficient size to provide stable estimates of
achievement at school level. Accordingly, the Year 3 and Year 5 data from each school were amalgamated to generate school-level clusters of twenty students. As a consequence it was necessary to standardise the Year 5 scores on the same mean (300) and standard deviation (100) as the Year 3 scores. The achievement scores are thus relative to the Year level. If this were not done some important within Year level results such as the relationship between enjoyment and achievement would not have been evident because although achievement increases from Year 3 to Year 5 enjoyment declines. The need to have a school-level cluster of sufficient size meant that it was not possible to conduct the multilevel analysis separately for boys and girls. With only ten girls (or ten boys per school) there was not sufficient stability in the results.

Finally, some composite variables were formed so that highly correlated variables were not separately included in the same analysis. Highly correlated independent variables can cause problems for interpretation and analysis. One example of a composite variable is the ‘enjoyment of literacy-related activities’ formed from measures of enjoyment reading books, writing, listening to stories, speaking in class and watching films.

Results of the multilevel analysis are obtained in terms of a number of statistics including metric regression coefficients. These coefficients were applied to the literacy scale to obtain values that indicated the net influence of each significant variable on achievement. This was recorded as the change in achievement score (on a scale with a mean of 300 and a standard deviation of 100) that would be associated with a change in the value of variable from the minimum to the maximum if all other factors were held constant. These results are shown as net influences in Table 4.3 (page 208).
REFERENCES


Survey Procedures
Mapping Literacy Achievement
Funds were provided to support State-level co-ordination activities, which were particularly demanding in the larger States.

The State and Territory co-ordinators and contacts were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Co-ordinators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Ms Margaret Willis, Mr Mark Wigley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Ms Bernadette Thorn, Ms Debra McKenna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Mr Huang Zheng-Sen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Ms Christine Ludwig, Ms Pam Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Ms Marlene Henschke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>Ms Annette Moult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Mr David Howes, Ms Corrine Assey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Ms Iris Forrest, Ms Jocelyn Cook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following report summarises the views of State/Territory Co-ordinators on the practical implementation of the Survey at the school and system level.

This was the first major national survey of school English literacy for many years. It involved a new methodology and had to be implemented in a very limited timeframe. In this context the implementation of the Survey proceeded smoothly with relatively few problems. However, there were some practical implementation issues that require consideration. The following report sets out the general findings on these issues and makes recommendations in Section C about areas where streamlining could occur for future surveys.

A. MAIN SAMPLE

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT BY EXTERNAL ASSESSORS

The collaboration between external assessors and teachers and the professional support provided by the external assessors were central features of the Survey methodology. The Survey methodology was unique in terms of the degree and intensity of professional development it provided for both participating classroom teachers and external assessors.

EXTERNAL ASSESSORS

- External assessors saw their participation in the Survey as a valuable professional experience.
- The national three day training program for the external assessors at Geelong in July
1996 was critical to the role of the external assessors in moderating the assessments of teachers participating in the Survey. It was also seen as a most positive but challenging professional development experience. The opportunity to work collaboratively on assessment with literacy experts from all States and Territories and from government and non-government systems was highly valued.

**Participating teachers**

- Teachers saw participation in the Survey and the associated training as a worthwhile professional development experience.
- State-level training was well organised and seen as informative, practical, relevant and supportive.
- Exploration of the assessment materials highlighted areas of strength and areas for improvement in teaching practice and provided models for teachers to continue to use and to assist with assessment at the school level. In particular, many teachers felt they improved their teaching and assessment practices by using the materials in Viewing, Listening and Speaking, areas which have previously received less explicit attention. Following their involvement in the Survey, many of the teachers indicated that they could now more effectively address all the aspects of literacy—reading and viewing, writing, speaking and listening—in their planning, teaching and assessment practices.
- At the start of the training many teachers were surprised at the amount of work required. Sometimes expectations were not sufficiently clear about what the Survey entailed and the benefits for participating students and teachers. In particular, schools and teachers would have appreciated more explicit information about the necessary time commitments when invited to participate.
- Participating teachers valued the professional support provided by external assessors throughout the Survey period and appreciated their role in moderating judgements of student performance.

**Systems**

- Systems valued the opportunity for a significant number and a broad range of their teachers to participate in a highly focused professional development exercise which drew together learning and assessment in a practical way in the classroom.
- Systems valued the opportunity for participants to learn and implement new skills.
- Systems appreciated the flexibility in the Survey design which enabled useful links to be made between the national exercise and existing State/Territory/system practices. This flexibility was directly related to the role of the External Assessors.

**Organisation of the Survey**

**Co-ordination**

The provision of specific resources for co-ordination at the State level was found to be of critical importance in implementing a Survey of this size and methodology. State-level co-ordination of professional development and of the external assessors with participating teachers in schools was a major exercise but fundamental to a methodology based on teacher judgement. In future surveys, the number of students involved is likely to be greater so that data are reliable at the State and Territory as well as the national level. This is a further reason for appropriate State-level co-ordination processes.
TIME AND TIMELINES

- Overall, the Survey implementation timelines were too short.
  - Schools and teachers needed earlier notice of participation.
  - Much earlier information on the nature of the Survey tasks for participating teachers would have facilitated planning for
    - the integration of the common tasks into classroom units of work;
    - the collection of appropriate samples of student best work. Many teachers did not have to hand sufficient examples of best work to meet the Survey requirements.
  - More lead time was required to organise both the central training of external assessors and the training of participating teachers at the State level.
  - The Survey placed high demands on teacher time over a short period.
  - External assessors generally found that they required more time than anticipated for their work in planning, supporting teachers and visiting schools.
- In some States, Term 3 was a particularly intense period of activity because the implementation of the Survey coincided with a number of other major activities eg basic skills testing and special intervention programs.

TEACHER RELIEF

The provision of teacher relief funds was nationally administered by the Tasmanian Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development. The national administration of this aspect of the Survey was conducted in a very efficient manner, but because of significant differences in the operation of teacher relief at State and regional levels, some schools and teachers were confused about the procedures for claiming reimbursement.

OTHER ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS

- Student absences caused significant practical difficulties in collecting work.
- Administering assessment tasks to the whole class was preferred but copying costs were often prohibitive.
- Distance presented logistical difficulties in those States where the population is dispersed. External assessors working with teachers in remote schools required extensive travelling time. Late delivery of materials to some remote areas left limited time for implementation.
- Some schools were confused by invitations to participate in the Survey from national-level agencies rather than through the usual State or Territory communication channels.

SURVEY MATERIALS

COMMON ASSESSMENT TASKS

- Teachers were positive about the tasks, which were seen as of a high quality, well produced and organised.
- The vast majority of students reacted positively to the tasks.
- The range of difficulty in the assessment tasks did not adequately allow for demonstration of achievement at lower levels. This was particularly the case at Year 5.
- Some texts for some tasks at Year 3 were seen to be too long, time to implement some tasks was too short and some tasks, particularly in writing, needed more contextualisation.
BEST WORK IN WRITING AND SPEAKING

- Participating teachers were particularly supportive of this aspect of the methodology.

DETERMINING LEVELS

- The process for determining levels was a major aspect of training and generally the approach adopted was successful. However, some teachers considered that the level statements for assessment were too broad and others were concerned that they did not correlate exactly with the national profile levels.
- Some teachers felt the marking guides were not specific enough, particularly in the areas of Listening and Viewing.

B. INDIGENOUS SAMPLE

Every effort was made to ensure that the Survey methodology and implementation practice were as consistent as possible across the country. However, there were some significant differences in the design of the Comprehensive and the Indigenous Sample. These differences mean that it is not valid to compare the achievement data arising from the Comprehensive Sample with the achievement data arising from the Indigenous Sample.

Many of the practical implementation issues for the Indigenous Sample were the same as those outlined for the Comprehensive Sample. However, there were some important differences in implementation and this section focuses on those issues. These differences may not have allowed all students to demonstrate their best performances and may have affected the quantity of data collected for the Indigenous Sample.

Assessment situations tend to be more stressful than the ongoing teaching situation but some aspects of the methodology meant that in practice the Survey was a stressful experience for some Indigenous students and their teachers. However, many teachers were able to adjust the presentation of the assessment tasks within the confines of the Survey methodology to help students feel more comfortable.

Specific aspects of the Survey methodology and other issues contributing to stress for both students and teachers in the Indigenous Sample are outlined below.

TIMING ISSUES

Short timeframes had more impact on students, teachers and schools participating in the Indigenous Sample. The need for a separate Indigenous Sample had not been indicated by the 1995 trial of the Survey methodology and did not become obvious until fairly late in the process of designing the samples for the Survey. Because of the need to consult widely about the design for the Indigenous Sample, many schools and teachers were given very little notice about their participation in the Survey and in some cases were asked to implement the Survey in an unrealistic timeframe. In some remote schools, assessment materials were received late. The very limited time available made it difficult to integrate the assessment tasks into the normal flow of classroom activities and in some instances assessment had to be carried out almost every day. This increased stress for some students in the Indigenous Sample.
IMPLEMENTATION BY UNFAMILIAR TEACHERS

The design of the Samples required that assessment be conducted by students’ usual classroom teacher. However, in a number of cases teachers were asked to select Indigenous students from several classes to make up the numbers required. Consequently some students in the Indigenous Sample were not assessed by a familiar teacher and this may have increased the stress of the assessment situation.

ASSESSMENT TASKS

• The range of difficulty in the assessment tasks did not adequately allow for the demonstration of achievement at lower levels. Some tasks were too long and more flexibility in their administration would have been useful.
• The content of some tasks was irrelevant to the experiences of children in Indigenous communities, particularly those in remote communities.
• Some of the tasks and their application presented difficulties in Indigenous communities where hearing impairment is significant.
• The transience of communities and families and the students’ involvement in family and cultural commitments caused practical difficulties in conducting and collecting sets of assessments over a period of time.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SURVEYS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It is recommended that if future surveys are based on teacher judgement a similar professional development and training strategy be adopted.

TIMING

It is recommended that:

• schools and teachers be notified of their participation in a proposed survey at least a term before the commencement of the survey;
• at the time of invitation to participate, schools and teachers be provided with explicit information about the advantages of participating in the survey, and a clear idea of expectations and the necessary time commitments;
• participating teachers be provided with earlier advice about the nature of the survey tasks to facilitate their planning for:
  - the integration of tasks with classroom units of work, and
  - the collection of appropriate samples of student best work;
• materials be available in sufficient time to enable adequate planning for the professional development of external assessors and participating teachers;
• the period of time for implementing the survey be extended to a full term so that administering the tasks, and completing the assessment process, is not rushed.

METHODOLOGY

It is recommended that in future surveys:

• the relationship between assessment levels determined by common tasks and criteria for best work and the levels in the national profile be made more explicit;
• the scope and structure of assessment tasks encompass a wider range of difficulty to permit demonstration of competence at lower achievement levels;
• participating teachers be provided with advice about how the assessment tasks can
be administered flexibly and integrated effectively into their classroom practice;
• particular attention be given to the marking guides in listening and viewing;
• schools and teachers be provided with specific advice and support for implementing
the survey methodology and tasks flexibly with students in an Indigenous sample.

CO-ORDINATION AND RESOURCES

It is recommended that:
• specific resources for co-ordination at the State level be provided to implement
surveys using a similar methodology;
• teacher relief funds should be administered at the State level to cater for differences
between States, Territories and systems in the provision of teacher relief;
• invitations to schools to participate be issued through the usual State or Territory
communication channels to avoid confusion at the school level;
• funds be provided to participating schools/teachers for copying to enable the
assessment tasks to be administered to the whole class.
### Development of the Assessment Methodology

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Payment to ACER to conduct trial for the Survey</td>
<td>$542 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert support</td>
<td>$19 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>$564 800</strong></td>
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</table>

### Implementation of the 1996 Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Payment to ACER for establishing the samples, developing the</td>
<td>$545 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>questionnaires, implementing, analysing and preparing the Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher relief for the 1996 Survey</td>
<td>$747 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials for the 1996 Survey</td>
<td>$148 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National training</td>
<td>$92 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-level costs for training and travel</td>
<td>$146 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-level co-ordination costs</td>
<td>$50 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1 729 600</strong></td>
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</table>

### Benchmarking Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Item</th>
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<tr>
<td>Payment to ACER</td>
<td>$30 000</td>
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### Publishing and Communications Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$220 000</td>
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</table>

### Meetings of Steering Committee/Management Committee/Sub-Committees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$90 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$2 634 400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The construction of the Survey scales has allowed students' literacy achievements to be described, illustrated, and compared, as well as interpreted in terms of the levels of the English profile. These interpretations of the Survey results show the kinds of literacy skills students have developed and indicate the range of achievements within each Year level, but they do not show how students have performed in relation to expectations for literacy achievement.

The Steering Committee negotiated a number of broad aims for the Survey. One of these aims was:

- to obtain base-line data so that it is possible to establish national benchmarks against which teachers, schools, and systems can assess the effectiveness of current programs and can adjust their goals and programs to improve literacy levels (see page 5).

During the course of the Survey, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, at its March 1997 meeting, committed itself to the goal:

- 'that every child leaving primary school should be numerate and able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level'.

To deliver this goal, Ministers endorsed a plan which included the development of benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. The purpose of benchmarks is to define standards of literacy and numeracy that all students should achieve by the end of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The Benchmarking Taskforce coordinated the development of literacy and numeracy benchmarks during 1997 with the intention that students' achievements would be reported against benchmarks from 1998. By June 1997, draft benchmarks for Years 3 and 5 for reading, writing, and spelling were available for consultation.

Although the Survey was not initially designed to report against benchmarks, the Management Committee recognised that these two parallel processes could support each other: the Survey conclusions about the kinds and distribution of literacy skills among Year 3 and Year 5 students should be useful in informing the development of benchmarks; and, in turn, the draft literacy benchmarks might be useful in interpreting students' Survey performances.

The Steering Committee for the Survey asked ACER to consider the relationship between the Survey results and the draft benchmarks, recognising that the benchmarks were still in draft form, the process of consultation on the benchmarks had not been completed, and some of the benchmarks were still in a preliminary phase of development.

After consulting with the writers of the literacy benchmarks, ACER decided not to pursue the investigation of the relationship between the Survey results and the draft benchmarks in viewing, speaking, and listening, and to investigate the relationship only for writing and reading.
Because the assessment materials used in the National School English Literacy Survey were not developed to address the draft benchmark indicators, the first step in the process was to examine the extent to which the Survey assessment tasks addressed the broad areas of writing and reading identified in the professional elaboration of the draft benchmark framework. The results of this analysis are shown in Figures A3.1 to A3.4. Areas of writing and reading addressed by the Survey tasks are shown with a tick; those not addressed, with a cross. Multiple crosses and ticks indicate separate sub-areas addressed.

**Year 3 Draft Writing Benchmark**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>texts</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contextual understanding (purpose and audience)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistic structures and features (generic structure)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistic structures and features (grammar)</td>
<td>✓ ✓ x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistic structures and features (vocabulary)</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistic structures and features (punctuation)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategies (planning)</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategies (proof reading)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure A3.1 Year 3 draft writing benchmark areas addressed by the Survey**

**Year 5 Draft Writing Benchmark**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>texts</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contextual understanding (purpose and audience)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistic structures and features (generic structure)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistic structures and features (grammar)</td>
<td>✓ x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistic structures and features (vocabulary)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistic structures and features (punctuation)</td>
<td>x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategies (planning)</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategies (proof reading)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure A3.2 Year 5 draft writing benchmark areas addressed by the Survey**
The second step was to consider the Survey indicators (descriptions of the literacy skills assessed in the Survey) one at a time in relation to the draft benchmarks. Each Survey indicator was classified as exemplifying either ‘benchmark’ or ‘below benchmark’ performance in writing or reading. During this process, the writers of the benchmarks were consulted to ensure that the classifications were consistent with the writers’ understandings of, and intentions for, the draft benchmarks.
DEMONSTRATING ‘BENCHMARK’ WRITING

In the following analyses, Survey results based on common task writing are reported against both the Year 3 and Year 5 draft writing benchmarks.

LOCATING THE YEAR 3 DRAFT BENCHMARK

The Year 3 draft writing benchmark was used to classify the Survey indicators in writing into two categories: those exemplifying ‘benchmark’ writing at Year 3, and those exemplifying ‘below benchmark’ writing, as shown in Figure A3.5. Indicators shown in black were classified as exemplifying at least benchmark writing performance; indicators shown in orange exemplify below benchmark writing skills. The indicators from Level 2 of the Survey writing scale (see pages 65 and 67) have been reorganised here so that the content and language (italicised) indicators classified as ‘benchmark’ appear above those classified ‘below benchmark’ at Year 3.

Figure A3.5 shows that two-thirds of the indicators in Level 2 were judged to exemplify below benchmark writing, meaning that the Year 3 draft writing benchmark is located towards the upper end of Level 2, as shown by the shaded band.
Displays some degree of critical distance.
Develops a few related arguments.
Expresses clear point of view.
Imitates or parodies genre (eg mystery narrative).
Incorporates some detailed reflection on personal experience.
Incorporates ideas, details and events most of which contribute to the storyline.
Incorporates prompts plausibly (eg visual narrative prompt).
Develops characterisation (explicitly, or implicitly).
Considers impact on audience (eg explores aspects of surprise, humour, suspense).
Begins to adopt organisational conventions of structured format (eg general introductory statement to a report).
Contains a variety of sentence forms (eg simple and complex sentences).
Uses appropriate punctuation most of the time.
Shapes writing with clear beginning and end and possibly paragraph divisions.
Uses appropriate vocabulary most of the time.
Spells most words correctly.

Comments on issues briefly and superficially.
Expresses opinions based on personal experience.
Uses narrow range of ideas (incorporates a few inter-related thoughts).
Shapes writing with degree of coherence (eg logical sequence of events), but little sense of conscious control of content.
Defines characters minimally (eg given names).
Identifies key events, main characters and settings in a narrative.
Shows some evidence of planning, revising and proof reading own writing.
Controls simple sentence structure and attempts more complex structures.
Attempts to vary sentence beginnings.
Attempts to shape piece structurally (eg notion of beginning and end).
Spells many common words correctly.
Writes legibly.

Incorporates two or more ideas with little development.
Uses simple sentences.
Uses simple conjunctions (eg ‘and’ and ‘but’).
Controls common punctuation some or all of the time (eg capital letters, full stops).
Relies on assertion rather than argument.
Relies heavily on the prompts (eg copies phrases)
Suggests plot but lacks coherence (eg incomplete, gaps in the story logic).
Contains irrelevant details.
Shows little shape (eg brief or long and disjointed, repetitive, strays from task).
Shows a basic understanding of task.
Uses repetitive sentence structure.
Spells high frequency words correctly most of the time.
Writes in a way that can be generally interpreted by others.
REPORTING AGAINST THE YEAR 3 DRAFT BENCHMARK

Figure A3.6 shows the distribution of Year 3 and Year 5 students’ estimated writing achievements. The percentages of students at various locations along the Survey writing scale are shown.

Given that the draft writing benchmark is located in profile Level 2, students who performed below Level 2 (i.e. in Level 1) definitely have not met the draft writing benchmark, and students performing above Level 2 (i.e. in Levels 3 and 4) definitely have met the benchmark. Some students assessed at Level 2 met the benchmark; others did not.

Table A3.1 shows Year 3 students’ performance in relation to the draft writing benchmark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels 3 and 4 (above benchmark)</th>
<th>59%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 (benchmark in this Level)</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 (below benchmark)</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE A3.6 PERFORMANCES IN RELATION TO THE YEAR 3 DRAFT WRITING BENCHMARK

Relating Survey to Draft Benchmarks
Locating the Year 5 Draft Benchmark

The Year 5 draft writing benchmark was used to classify the Survey indicators in writing into two categories: those exemplifying ‘benchmark’ writing at Year 5, and those exemplifying ‘below benchmark’ writing, as shown in Figure A3.7. Indicators shown in black were classified as exemplifying at least benchmark writing performance; indicators shown in orange exemplify below benchmark writing skills. The indicators from Level 3 of the Survey writing scale (see pages 65 and 67) have been reorganised here so that the content and language (italicised) indicators classified as ‘benchmark’ appear above those classified ‘below benchmark’ at Year 5.

Figure A3.7 shows that almost half the indicators in Level 3 were judged to exemplify below benchmark writing, meaning that the Year 5 draft writing benchmark is located just below the middle of Level 3, as shown by the shaded band.
Displays some degree of critical distance.
Expresses clear point of view.
Imitates or parodies genre (e.g., mystery narrative).
Incorporates some detailed reflection on personal experience.
Incorporates ideas, details, and events most of which contribute to the storyline.
Incorporates prompts plausibly (e.g., visual narrative prompt).
Develops characterisation (explicitly, or implicitly).
Considers impact on audience (e.g., explores aspects of surprise, humour, suspense).

Begins to adopt organisational conventions of structured format (e.g., general introductory statement to a report).
Contains a variety of sentence forms (e.g., simple and complex sentences).
Uses appropriate punctuation most of the time.
Shapes writing with clear beginning and end and possibly paragraph divisions.
Uses appropriate vocabulary most of the time.
Spells most words correctly.

Comments on issues briefly and superficially.
Expresses opinions based on personal experience.
Uses narrow range of ideas (incorporates a few inter-related thoughts).
Shapes writing with degree of coherence (e.g., logical sequence of events), but little sense of conscious control of content.
Shows some evidence of planning, revising and proof reading own writing.
Controls simple sentence structure and attempts more complex structures.

Attempts to vary sentence beginnings.
Defines characters minimally (e.g., given names).
Identifies key events, main characters and settings in a narrative.
Shapes distinguishable story-line in a narrative.
Attempts to shape piece structurally (e.g., notion of beginning and end).
Spells many common words correctly.
Writes legibly.

Incorporates two or more ideas with little development.
Uses simple sentences.
Uses simple conjunctions (e.g., ‘and’ and ‘but’).
Controls common punctuation some or all of the time (e.g., capital letters, full stops).
Relies on assertion rather than argument.
Relies heavily on the prompts (e.g., copies phrases)
Suggests plot but lacks coherence (e.g., incomplete, gaps in the story logic).
Contains irrelevant details.
Shows little shape (e.g., brief or long and disjointed, repetitive, strays from task).
Shows a basic understanding of task.
Uses repetitive sentence structure.
Spells high frequency words correctly most of the time.
Writes in a way that can be generally interpreted by others.
REPORTING AGAINST THE YEAR 5 DRAFT BENCHMARK

Figure A3.8 opposite shows the distribution of Year 3 and Year 5 students’ estimated writing achievements. The percentages of students at various locations along the Survey writing scale are shown.

Given that the draft writing benchmark is located in profile Level 3, students who performed below Level 3 (i.e., in Level 2) definitely have not met the draft writing benchmark, and students performing above Level 3 (i.e., in Levels 4 and 5) definitely have met the benchmark. Some students assessed at Level 3 met the benchmark, others did not.

Table A3.2 shows Year 5 students’ performance in relation to the draft writing benchmark.

| Levels 4 and 5 (above benchmark) | 38% |
| Level 3 (benchmark in this Level) | 47% |
| Level 2 (below benchmark) | 15% |
FIGURE A3.8 PERFORMANCES IN RELATION TO THE YEAR 5 DRAFT WRITING BENCHMARK

Figure A3.8 Performances in relation to the Year 5 draft writing benchmark.
Demonstrating ‘benchmark’ Reading

In the following analyses, Survey results are reported against both the Year 3 and Year 5 draft reading benchmarks.

Locating the Year 3 draft benchmark

The Year 3 draft reading benchmark was used to classify the Survey reading tasks into two categories: those exemplifying ‘benchmark’ reading at Year 3, and those exemplifying ‘below benchmark’ reading, as shown in Figure A3.9. Reading tasks shown in black were classified as exemplifying at least ‘benchmark’ reading performance; indicators shown in orange exemplify ‘below benchmark’ reading skills.

Figure A3.9 shows that at least two-thirds of the tasks in Level 2 were judged to exemplify below benchmark reading, meaning that the Year 3 draft reading benchmark is located towards the upper end of Level 2, as shown by the shaded band.
Figure A3.9 The Year 3 reading benchmark on the Survey reading scale.
REPORTING AGAINST THE YEAR 3 DRAFT BENCHMARK

Figure A3.10 opposite shows the distribution of Year 3 and Year 5 students’ estimated reading achievements. The percentages of students at various locations along the Survey reading scale are shown.

Given that the draft reading benchmark is located in profile Level 2, students who performed below Level 2 (ie in Level 1) definitely have not met the draft reading benchmark, and students performing above Level 2 (ie in Levels 3 and 4) definitely have met the benchmark. Some students assessed at Level 2 met the benchmark; others did not.

Table A3.3 shows Year 3 students’ performance in relation to the draft reading benchmark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels 3 and 4 (above benchmark)</th>
<th>54%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 (benchmark in this Level)</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 (below benchmark)</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure A3.10 Performances in relation to the Year 3 draft reading benchmark.
Locating the Year 5 draft benchmark

The Year 5 draft reading benchmark was used to classify the Survey reading tasks into two categories: those exemplifying ‘benchmark’ reading at Year 5, and those exemplifying ‘below benchmark’ reading, as shown in Figure A3.11. Reading tasks shown in black were classified as exemplifying at least ‘benchmark’ reading performance; tasks shown in orange exemplify ‘below benchmark’ reading skills.

Figure A3.11 shows that about half the tasks in Level 3 were judged to exemplify below benchmark reading, meaning that the Year 5 draft reading benchmark is located near the middle of Level 3, as shown by the shaded band.
FIGURE A3.11 THE YEAR 5 READING BENCHMARK ON THE SURVEY READING SCALE
REPORTING AGAINST THE YEAR 5 DRAFT BENCHMARK

Figure A3.12 opposite shows the distribution of Year 3 and Year 5 students’ estimated reading achievements. The percentages of students at various locations along the Survey reading scale are shown.

Given that the draft reading benchmark is located in profile Level 3, students who performed below Level 3 (ie in Level 2) definitely have not met the draft reading benchmark, and students performing above Level 3 (ie in Levels 4 and 5) definitely have met the benchmark. Some students assessed at Level 3 met the benchmark; others did not.

Table A3.4 shows Year 5 students’ performances in relation to the draft writing benchmark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels 4 and 5 (above benchmark)</th>
<th>51%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 (benchmark in this Level)</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 (below benchmark)</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE A3.12 PERFORMANCES IN RELATION TO THE YEAR 5 DRAFT READING BENCHMARK

Reading Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Level 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Year 3

Year 5

YEAR 5 DRAFT BENCHMARK RANGE