



CAN OZZIES REED AND RITE?

Literacy levels in Australia

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In 1996, a literacy survey was conducted in Australia by experienced interviewers.

This survey was called *The Survey of Aspects of Literacy (SAL)*. The focus was on functional literacy and numeracy, and the people surveyed were aged between 15 and 74.

Three different types of skills were tested: prose literacy, document literacy, and numeracy. The achievement level for each type of skill was divided into five levels, Level 1 being the lowest level of achievement and Level 5 being the highest.

Examples of the different tasks included at the different levels are:

LEVEL 1

Prose literacy Locating information on a medicine label giving the maximum number of days the medicine should be taken.

Document literacy Using a simple chart to find a specified percentage.

Numeracy Adding a handling charge to the total cost on an order form.

LEVEL 2

Prose literacy Using information in an article to explain what happens when a plant is exposed to low temperatures

Document literacy Using a compound interest table to list all the rates which will yield more than \$500 interest if \$100 is invested for 20 years

Numeracy Using a weather chart for Asia to calculate the difference between today's temperatures in Bangkok and Seoul

LEVEL 3

Prose literacy Explaining how to check for correct seat height on a bicycle, according to a page from a bicycle maintenance manual

Document literacy Listing two features not included on any basic clock radio in a consumer advice table

Numeracy Calculating the difference in oil consumption by a specified group across two different years

LEVEL 4

Prose literacy Contrasting two types of warranty described on a warranty card for an appliance

Document literacy Writing a brief summary contrasting the distribution of oil consumption in two pie charts

Numeracy Using a compound interest table, calculate the total interest earned if investing \$100 at 6% for 10 years

LEVEL 5

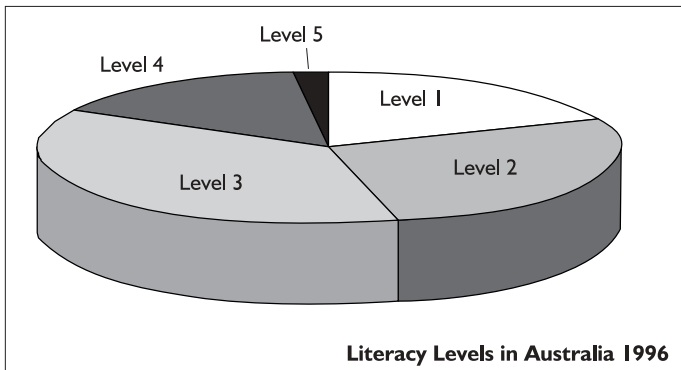
Prose literacy Describing in their own words one difference between two types of job interview outlined in an employment pamphlet

Document literacy Using a consumer advice table to identify the average advertised price for a clock radio meeting specified conditions

Numeracy Using a table to calculate the percentage of calories derived from fat, given total fat in grams, calories, and the number of calories contained in each gram of fat

Conclusions

The conclusions arrived at regarding the standards of achievement were:



Level 1 achievers would experience considerable difficulty using printed materials in daily life. (The number of people at this level included those who could not successfully complete even these simple tasks.)

Level 2 achievers would experience some difficulty using printed materials in daily life.

Level 3 achievers would cope with using printed materials in daily life, but not always at a high level of proficiency.

Level 4 & 5 achievers are capable of managing the literacy demands of everyday life.

The following breakdown of results shows the percentage of Australians likely to achieve at each Level (I have rounded the percentages):

Level 1	19%
Level 2	27%
Level 3	36%
Level 4	15%
Level 5	2%

The results of the Survey show that only 17% of Australians are 'capable of managing the literacy demands of everyday life'. They also showed that only 10 percent of people aged between 15 and 19 achieved Levels 4 or 5. (Even though the spread of people in this age group ranges

between those dropping out of school and those in second year university, I would have expected a higher standard of achievement after ten to fifteen years of education.)

This information also explains why the type of student who uses our curriculum is appreciated in the workplace and in tertiary institutions; these students are far more than ‘capable’.

If they are hard-working, they are more likely to be judged ‘exceptional’.

One part of the survey which I found particularly interesting was the results of the section in which participants estimated their competency, before doing the tests. Of those who rated their skills as ‘excellent’:

- 28% achieved only at Levels 1 or 2 on the prose test;
- 23% achieved only at Levels 1 or 2 on the numeracy test.

Having seen the results of this survey, I find it easier to understand why a number of parents complain that some of the work we require is ‘irrelevant’. Since many of these parents would judge their own skills to be more than adequate, they cannot see any reason to encourage their child to achieve at a higher level than they achieved. How many of these parents would, in fact, achieve only at Levels 1 or 2? How many

would make educational decisions for their children based on a very low standard of achievement, perhaps unnecessarily depriving their child of a higher standard of achievement, and perhaps, a better life?

It is important to give your child the highest standard of education he is capable of achieving

What difference did educational achievement have on lifestyle? At least 30% of those in Level 1 were unemployed. 65% of people who had a tertiary (TAFE or university) qualification were in Levels 4 or 5.

It is important for Christian home schoolers to give their child the highest standard of education he is capable of achieving—the type of education which will train up the child ‘in the way he should go’, remembering that children called to different occupations need different training.

This information is available on the internet. If you would like to print off a copy, go to the Australian Bureau of Statistics site at www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/ then ask the search facility to search for ‘Aspects of Literacy’. When that comes up, look through the results for: Aspects of Literacy: Assessed Literacy Skills (the ABS number for this document is: 4228.0).