

The A•S•K Assessment provides teachers with a profile of achievement in relation to key reading, thinking and communication competencies - standards – outlined in the curriculum. Through the A•S•K teachers gain a snapshot of achievement in relation to standards set for learners of a similar age. The A•S•K Competencies Continuum is used to guide daily planning and teaching. With an eye on the competencies, teachers use the continuum to personalize and differentiate the learning.

The A•S•K process reflects the principles for classroom assessment¹:

- Classroom assessment provides information to support personalization of learning, to improve learning, and to communicate with parents.
- Classroom assessment happens in an ongoing fashion and should be seamlessly intertwined with instruction. Assessment is designed to give timely feedback.
- Classroom assessments should be based on clear criteria and examples so that students know what is expected.
- Students should be part of the assessment process and involved in setting criteria, setting their own learning goals and designing demonstrations.
- Classroom assessment should include a wide variety of opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning.
- Performance tasks should be substantial and get at deeper learning and understanding.
- Support materials developed for classroom assessment should provide teachers with a good understanding of how skills or processes develop (to make clear what “is next”).
- Classroom assessment is not an event. Assessment is a natural outflow of the instruction-assessment-evaluation-learning cycle.
- Assessment is tied to learning, not behaviours. It is important to separate out unrelated elements from the learning standards (excerpt from: *Transforming Assessment*, Ministry of Education, 2014)

The A•S•K includes:

- A baseline assessment conducted in mid-late September, after learners have settled into routines (October for K & 1), a mid-year assessment conducted in mid-February, and a year-end assessment conducted in May or early June.
- A flexible teacher protocol to guide the process
- Student response sheets
- Texts² that meet Ministry requirements for assessment
- Prompt sheets to streamline preparation
- An *A•S•K Skills & Competencies Continuum*³ for assessing achievement
- A *Class Summary Sheet* and a *Class Trends Sheet* for analysis and planning.

Information gained from the assessment guides teacher planning, teaching, and communication about achievement.

Standing on the Shoulders of Research

The A•S•K has had over five years of development and field-testing through action research cycles in B.C. and Alberta. Through the classroom-based work with hundreds of educators, we have come to understand so much more about assessing reading, thinking, and communication competencies. We have also come to understand the power of assessment, and involving learners in the process, for advancing learning.

The A•S•K assessment has been designed to structure engagement with text in ways that activate and stimulate networks of thinking – critical, creative, and reflective – before, during and after reading. Self-monitoring and learning about learning itself, is a feature of the process.

Some features of the A•S•K:

- **Learners are invited to read and respond to open-ended tasks that get at ‘deeper meaning and understanding’ in the text.**

Critical literacy goes beyond understanding literacy as a set of skills or practices (Ontario Curriculum, 2009).

In critical literacy readers explicitly analyze the author’s message (Pearson, 2001, in McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004).

- **During the A•S•K assessment learners are invited to use icons to set personal s-t-r-e-t-c-h goals before applying their skills and competencies.** We want to see if learners tailor their focus and adjust their goals to the skills at hand. As they gather information in different ways, and reflect on the effects of their choices, the work guides them to be mindful of the skills they are using, and how their ideas, connections, questions and predictions changes as they gain new information. The overall reading goal of gathering what is important to remember stays the same.

Given that visual, semantic, sensory, motor, and emotional neural networks all contain their own memory systems, multi-channel learning increases the likelihood of both storage and recall. (Posner, 1998; Schacter, 1992; Bergen, 2012).

When students learn to understand their own brains, they are equipped to take responsibility for their own learning. (Siegel, 2013, Dweck, 2006).

- **The A•S•K process is meant to be flexible and thoughtful.** Teachers are encouraged to adjust the process and the timing to suit their students’ needs. Teacher judgment guides the work.
- **The teacher-talk in the protocol is an example of language a teacher might use.** Teachers are encouraged to personalize the wording with language their learners are comfortable with.
- The **A•S•K-3to5 Skills & Competencies Continuum**³ has become a powerful tool for guiding, personalizing and differentiating daily work, and for conducting 1:1 coaching conferences with students. The continuum shows the teacher where the learners are in relation to standards set for learners of a similar age, and shows what to focus on next to advance the competencies. Information from the A•S•K, coupled with daily work, provides teachers with specific information for planning and teaching, discussing achievement with co-workers, and for communicating with parents.
- The **Class Summary** has become an invaluable tool for planning and communicating about achievement. People interested in looking for competency-specific patterns in achievement also find the **Class Trends Sheet** valuable.

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¹ <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/assessment>

² K-2 use levelled texts from published kits, and read-aloud material when using the A•S•K to assess viewing competencies.

³ Grade-specific continua were derived from the *B.C.Performance Standards for Reading and Responding* (1998). And field-tested and refined through pilot projects and research studies in B.C. and Alberta (2009-20014).

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