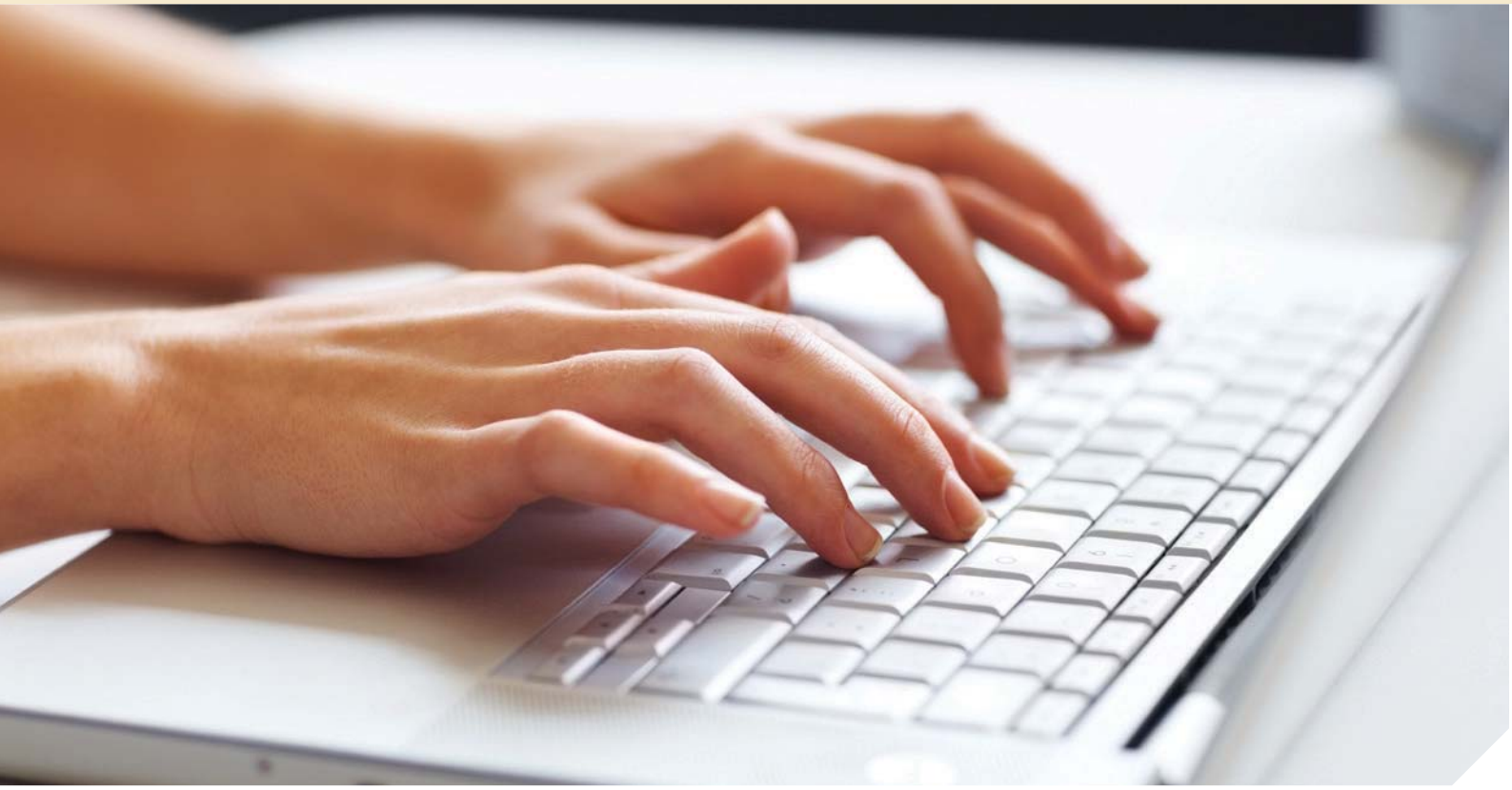
# 2011 Abridged Writing Framework

FOR THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT GOVERNING BOARD



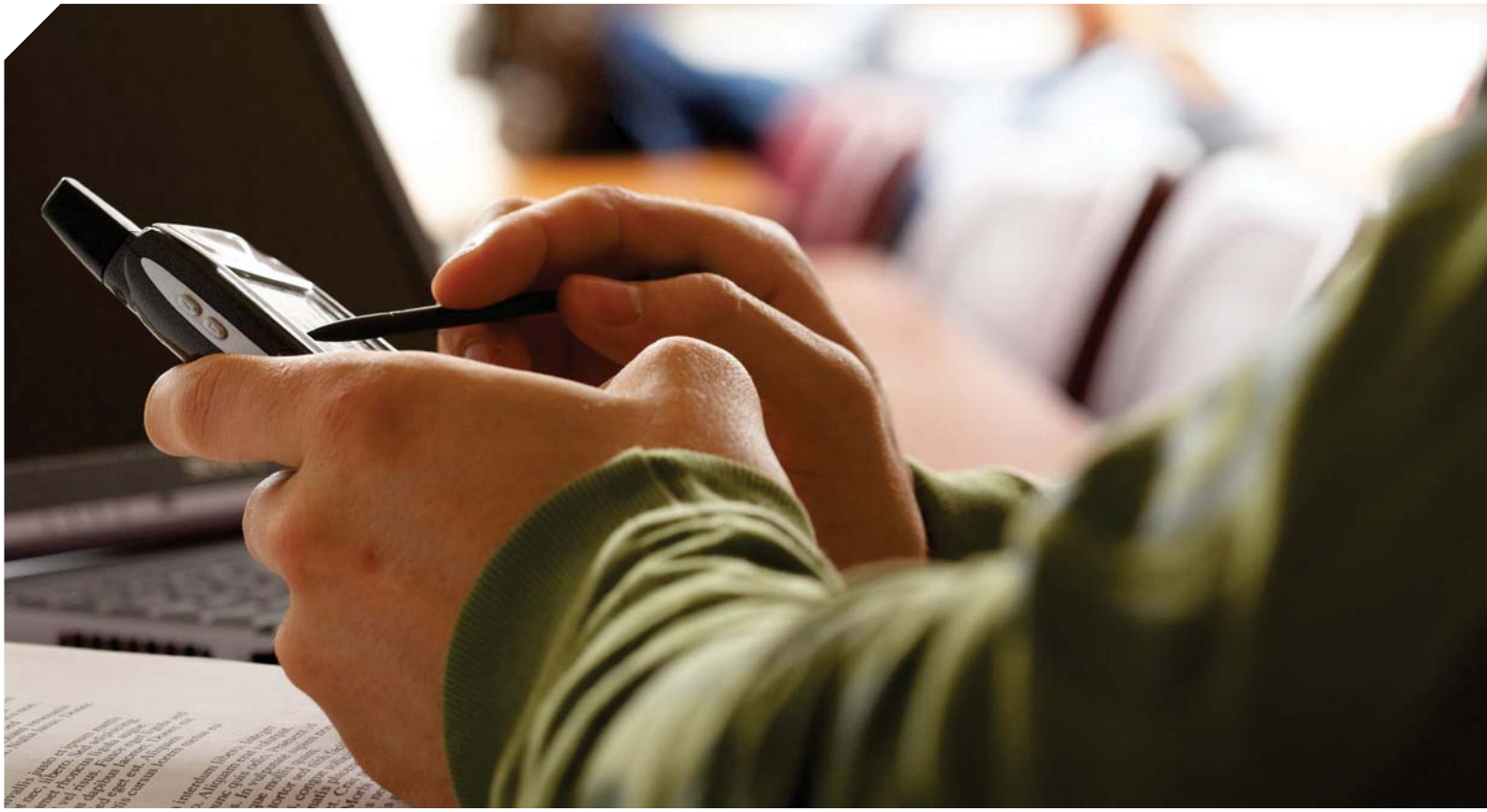
# Introduction

The impact of technology has fostered an unprecedented expansion of human communication, and has changed the way people write and the kinds of writing they do. As technology continues to alter societies and cultures, the ability to use written language to communicate with others is more relevant than ever. In K–12 education, writing and reasoning effectively are increasingly embedded in the learning of every subject discipline. In community and workplace settings, writing is essential to productivity and to personal and social advancement. Today's students will enter an information-based economy in which writing is more valued, and more critical to success, than ever before.

To understand whether students are able to meet the challenges of these expanding 21st century contexts for writing, the National Assessment Governing Board developed a rigorous and innovative **Writing Framework for the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)** that measures students' ability to write

for a specified purpose and audience under time constraints comparable to those writers face in academic and professional settings. With the 2011 Writing Framework, the Board introduced a computer-based format in which students write using word processing software with commonly available tools. The computerization of the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment takes into consideration the prevalence of computer technology in schools and the workplace, the projected growth of large-scale computer-based tests, and the increasing role computers play in economic and educational activities. The 2011 Writing Assessment was computer-based for students in grades 8 and 12, and the Board hopes to implement computer-based tests for grade 4 in the future.

Development of the 2011 NAEP Writing Framework involved the participation of more than 500 individuals from across the nation, reflecting diverse perspectives. Contributors included elementary, middle, secondary, and postsecondary educators; coordinators of writing instruction and assessment; experts in communication technologies; policymakers at all levels of government; representatives of the military; and business leaders.



# NAEP Writing Assessment

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as The Nation's Report Card, is the only continuing and nationally representative measure of trends in academic achievement of U.S. students in various subjects. By collecting and reporting information on student performance at the national, state, and local levels, NAEP is an integral part of our nation's evaluation of the condition and progress of education. The information NAEP provides about student achievement helps the public, educators, and policymakers understand strengths and weaknesses in student performance and make informed decisions about education.

The 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment is designed to measure students' writing ability at grades 4, 8, and 12, and provides the only nationally representative data on writing achievement. State- or district-level sampling is not available for 2011 since NAEP provides schools with the computers for use in the assessment. As computers become more widely available in schools, it may become feasible to implement a computer-based writing assessment at the state and district levels.

## GOALS FOR THE ASSESSMENT

Writing is a complex, multifaceted, and purposeful act of communication that is accomplished in a variety of environments, under various constraints of time, and with a variety of language resources and technological tools.

As a survey of student achievement, NAEP test questions are designed to measure what students know and are able to do in relation to the writing instruction they have received and in relation to expectations for postsecondary preparedness. Therefore, the 2011 NAEP Writing Framework sets the following goals for the NAEP Writing Assessment:

### *To encourage student writers to move beyond prescriptive or formulaic approaches in their writing*

Successful writers are able to make effective decisions consistently in all dimensions of their writing to communicate effectively with their audience. Therefore, writing tasks in this assessment are designed to evaluate students' ability to make effective choices in how they approach the development and organization of ideas and in how they craft language to support their communicative purpose.

### *To assess students' writing using word processing software with commonly available tools*

The computer plays a significant role in writing production and reflects new conditions for writing at school and at work. Therefore the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment assesses writing with word processing software at grades 8 and 12. At grade 4, students' keyboarding expertise and experience using computers on assessments will be reviewed as part of the planning process for a future NAEP Writing Assessment.

***To measure students' ability to respond to a writing task in an on-demand scenario***

On-demand writing situations occur in both academic and professional settings where writers must compose to achieve goals under time constraints. The 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment is designed to provide information about what students can accomplish in such on-demand writing situations.

# Focus Areas in NAEP Writing

People communicate to accomplish goals or meet needs. Writing, then, can be thought of as a relationship or negotiation between the writer and reader to satisfy the aims of both parties. Accordingly, the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment focuses on writing for communicative purposes and on the relationship of the writer to his or her intended audience.

## COMMUNICATIVE PURPOSES

The 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment measures three communicative purposes common to academic and professional settings:

***To persuade**, in order to change the reader's point of view or affect the reader's action*

Persuasive writing tasks ask writers to convince an audience to take action or change a viewpoint on a variety of topics important to others (for example, peers, school, or the nation). At **grade 4**, students might be asked to express and support a point of view. **Grade 8** students might be expected to review a proposal and convince others of its soundness with reasons and detailed evidence. **Grade 12** students might be assigned to compose an argument that demonstrates an understanding of other perspectives through its development and organization of ideas and that supports a position with logical reasoning.

**Example Writing Task for *To Persuade* (Grade 4)**

*Imagine that students at your school are going to select a new school mascot. A mascot is an animal or object used to represent a group. For example, many sports teams have mascots.*

*Four choices are being considered as your school's mascot: Tigers, Rising Stars, Dolphins, and Rockets. You have been asked to choose one of the four mascots and to support your choice in a letter to the school principal.*

*Write a letter to your principal convincing him or her that your choice should be the school mascot. Be sure to include reasons and examples in your letter.*

### *To explain, in order to expand the reader's understanding*

Writers who compose to explain seek to present information and ideas to others in a manner that aids understanding of a topic. On the NAEP Writing Assessment, tasks at **grade 4** might call for a basic explanation of personal knowledge or an explanation of a sequence of pictures or steps provided in the task. **Grade 8** tasks might ask students to analyze a process or write a response that compares similarities and differences between two events or ideas. **Grade 12** tasks might focus on asking students to identify the causes of a problem or to define a concept.

**Example Writing Task for *To Explain* (Grade 12)**

One of the writing tasks from the grade 12 assessment asked students to write about a type of technology that they use in their lives and why they value that technology. The Value of Technology task began with a short video about young people's use of technology. This video included animation and statistics about technology use. The written part of the task then specified an audience for students to address in explaining the value of a particular technology.

Visit http://nationsreportcard.gov/writing_2011/sample_quest.asp to view an actual example of the interactive writing prompt.

### *To convey experience, real or imagined, in order to communicate individual and imagined experience to others*

In conveying experience, writers seek to bring real or imagined experiences to life for the reader. Writers connect to their audiences through descriptive details, voice, style, reflection on the meaning and significance of events and actions, and evocation of emotional response. Tasks on the 2011

NAEP Writing Assessment encourage flexibility in thinking and form, allowing writers to organize complex reflective or imaginative responses.

At **grade 4**, students could be asked to craft a short story by narrating events and describing setting and characters. At **grade 8**, students could be asked to write a narrative account of a favorite memory or experience and convey how it affected the writer and others. At **grade 12**, a student might use writing to explore, reflect, and evaluate aspects of his or her character or growth as a person, using extended examples and self-questioning to illustrate the discussion.

**Example Writing Task for *To Convey Experience* (Grade 8)**

One of the writing tasks from the grade 8 assessment asked students to immerse themselves in an imaginary situation and to write about it as if from personal experience. In the Lost Island task, students listened to an audio recording of atmospheric sounds while reading a few sentences from an imaginary journal. The audio provided the sound of waves lapping on the shore, the squawking of birds, as well as the sound of footsteps in the sand to create a sense of the island world that the students were to imagine exploring. Students' responses to this task included both journal-style narratives as well as stories told in the third person.

Visit http://nationsreportcard.gov/writing_2011/sample_quest.asp to view an actual example of the interactive writing prompt.

## AUDIENCE

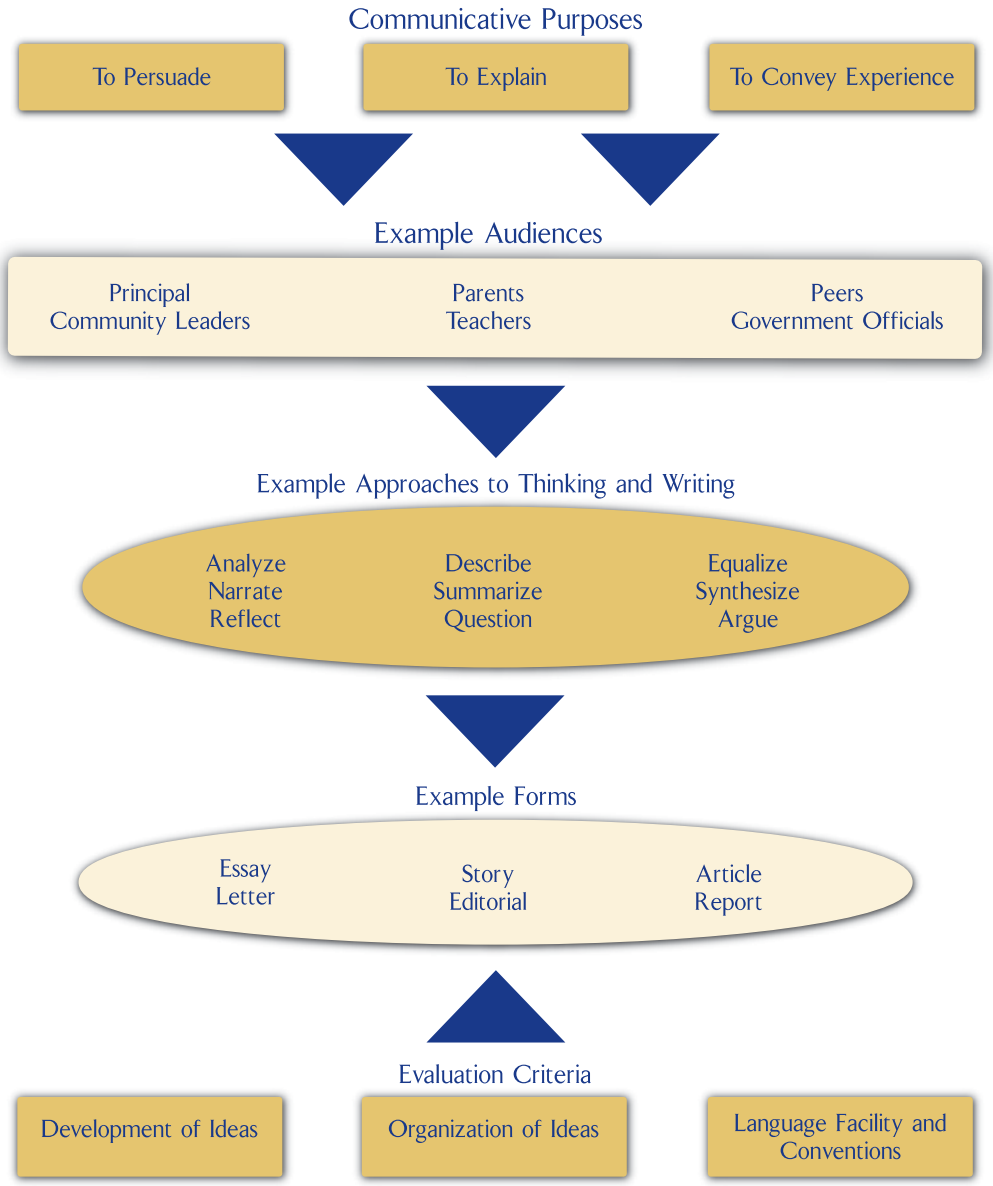
The intended recipient of a written text plays an important role in shaping the writer's approach to all dimensions of his or her response. From developing and organizing ideas to the language the student uses, clear and effective communication requires an awareness of readers' needs and their level of knowledge about the writing topic. For the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment, tasks specify or clearly imply an audience the student writers must address. For grade 4, the audience might include students' immediate circle of peers and teachers; for grades 8 and 12, the audience might expand to encompass less familiar, more authoritative audiences such as community and government leaders.

# FORM AND APPROACHES

The term "form" refers to the organizational features customarily required by a particular kind of writing, such as a short story, friendly letter, or letter of complaint. As a writer's purpose and audience should determine the selection of the most appropriate form, several forms may be effective for a given writing task. Students in grades 8 and 12 may need to choose the form (such as a story, editorial, or essay) that they believe is most effective for the purpose and audience specified in the task. Grade 4 students are assigned a form.

Approaches commonly used in effective written communication include analyzing, describing, evaluating, and narrating. Tasks on the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment are designed to encourage students to draw on a wide variety of approaches to support the development and organization of ideas.

Content Components for the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment



# Computer-Based Writing

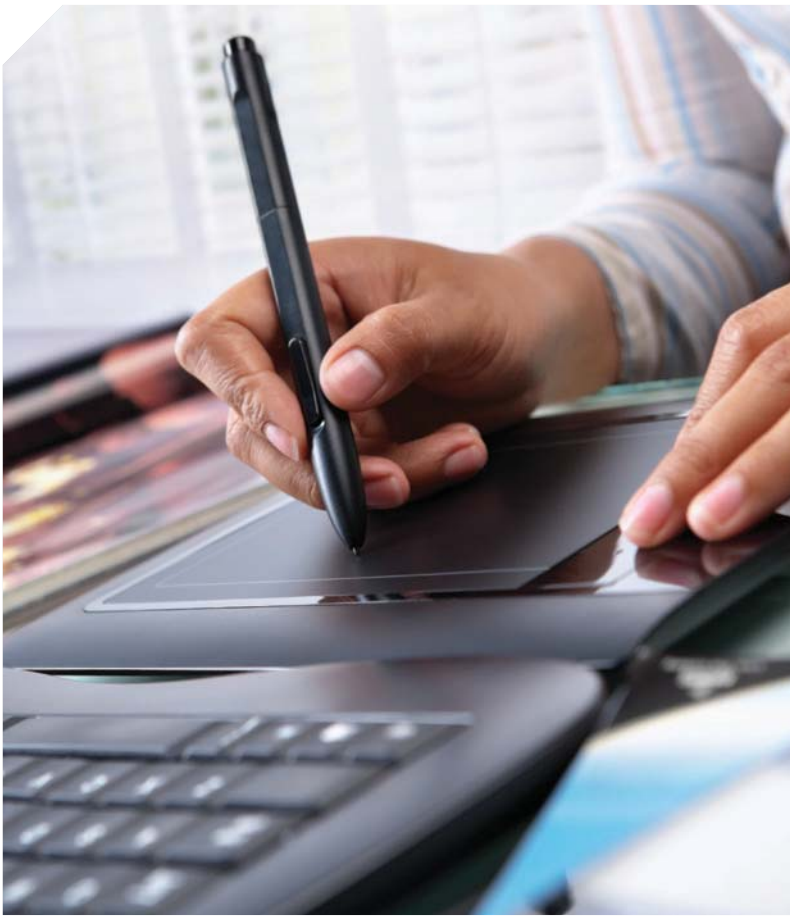
The 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment measures how well students write when using word processing software on a computer. The move to a computer-based assessment from traditional paper-and-pencil assessments acknowledges the vital role computers play in both student composition and writing instruction.

The computer-based assessment measures the ability of students in grades 8 and 12 to compose and construct their responses using word processing software with commonly available tools. The 2011 NAEP Writing Framework encourages a computer-based assessment at grade 4 by 2019. It is expected that increased access to computers and keyboarding instruction in elementary schools will provide students with more opportunities to compose on the computer, thus warranting the delivery of a computer-based assessment at grade 4. In 2012, NAEP conducted a large-scale pilot test of the computer-based writing assessment at grade 4. Findings from this pilot test will allow NAEP to learn how grade 4 students compose on computers and to address the expectations for computer proficiency and the role of computers in instruction.

In the context of NAEP, "tools" refers to the extensions built into word processing software that help writers modify or revise their texts.

The kinds of tools available for the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment include:

- **Editing Tools**, such as cut, copy, and paste, to add, delete, correct, or adapt typed text
- **Formatting Tools**, such as bolding and indenting, to alter the layout and appearance of text
- **Spelling Tools**, such as spell check, to verify or suggest options for accurate spelling
- **Reference Tools**, such as a thesaurus, to find a synonym/antonym for a word or phrase



# Evaluation of Student Responses

The most successful writers consistently make effective choices in all dimensions of their writing to achieve the purpose of the writing task and to meet the needs of their intended audience. The 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment is constructed to emphasize that many important features of writing contribute to the overall quality of a written response. For the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment, three domains of writing are evaluated at grades 4, 8, and 12:

Criterion 1. Is **development of ideas** effective in relation to the writer's purpose and audience? Components include:

- **Depth and Complexity:** Demonstrating insight, knowledge, or understanding that allow writers to move beyond a superficial discussion of a topic and establish credibility with the reader
- **Approaches to Thinking and Writing:** Describing, evaluating, reflecting, or questioning to support the development of ideas and connect with the reader
- **Details and Examples:** Illustrating points and expanding the reader's understanding through details and examples taken from the writer's experiences or observations

Criterion 2. Is **organization of ideas** logical in relation to the writer's purpose and audience? Components include:

- **Logical Text Structure:** Constructing the written response and arranging ideas in a logical progression appropriate to the topic, purpose, and audience of a writing task
- **Coherence and Focus:** Ensuring that ideas, details, and examples are clearly connected within and between paragraphs and are relevant to the purpose, topic, and audience for the text

Criterion 3. Do **language facility and conventions** support clarity of expression and effectiveness of the writing in relation to the writer's purpose and audience? Components include:

- **Sentence Structure and Sentence Variety:** Crafting the structure and variety of sentences to illuminate the writer's topic, to effectively accomplish the purpose of the task, and to engage the reader
- **Word Choice, Voice, and Tone:** Deciding what words, attitudes, and manners of expression will most precisely and clearly express the writer's ideas, support the purpose for writing, and encourage the reader to connect the writer's ideas and intentions
- **Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics:** Following established conventions and avoiding errors to facilitate understanding by allowing the reader to focus on the writer's thoughts and ideas

Responses are evaluated using a holistic scoring rubric, assessing performance across each communicative purpose.

# Reporting NAEP Results

The primary means for public release of the NAEP results is a summary report known as The Nation's Report Card, which provides detailed information on the nature of the assessment, the students who participate, and the assessment results. Reporting elements include scale scores, achievement level descriptions, and background variables.

Scale Scores, which are derived from student responses to NAEP assessment items, summarize the overall level of performance attained by a group of students. Performance for each grade is scaled separately; therefore, average scale scores cannot be compared across grades.

Achievement Level Descriptions represent an informed judgment of "how good is good enough" in the various subjects assessed. Generic policy definitions for achievement at the *Basic, Proficient,* and *Advanced* levels describe in very general terms what students at each grade level should know and be able to do on the assessment. NAEP results are reported as percentages of students performing at or above the *Basic* and *Proficient* levels and at the *Advanced* level. Subject-specific achievement level descriptions for each NAEP assessment are developed based on these generic policy definitions.

| ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL | POLICY DEFINITION |
|---|---|
| Basic | This level denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade. |
| Proficient | This level represents solid academic performance for each grade assessed. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter. |
| Advanced | This level signifies superior performance. |

Background Variables capture demographic information such as gender and race/ethnicity of the students, teachers, and school administrators participating in NAEP. In addition, background questionnaires include questions about variables related to achievement in writing. Background variables for the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment reflect two primary interests: **computer use** and **writing opportunities**. NAEP's ability to show similarities and differences among groups in relation to achievement in writing has the potential to inform educational policy at the national, state, and district level.

Results from the computer-based 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment at grades 8 and 12 will provide evidence of students' use of word processing tools commonly available in academic and professional settings. Because the computer plays a significant role in writing production, the technology used to compose is an important part of the writing process and reflects new conditions for writing at school and at work.

# Conclusion

The 2011 NAEP Writing Framework aims to meet the demands of assessing young people's ability to write to communicate in the 21st century. By focusing on the kinds of purpose-centered writing most common to K–12 and postsecondary settings, and by emphasizing the engagement of clearly defined audiences, the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment better emulates many real-world writing situations. Because students compose with word processing software at grades 8 and 12, the assessment offers a writing environment reflective of the way students most commonly compose in the 21st century. The assessment seeks new ways of understanding student writing achievement and encourages writing that moves beyond prescriptive or formulaic qualities. The 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment represents a way forward for the large-scale assessment of writing.

The National Assessment Governing Board is an independent, bipartisan board whose members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives, and members of the general public. Congress created the 26-member Governing Board in 1988 to set policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

For more information on the National Assessment Governing Board, please visit www.nagb.org or call us at 202-357-6938.