

Research on large scale assessment has shown that classroom time devoted to assessment preparation, beyond short sessions to familiarize students on the assessment format and related thinking strategies, can have a negative impact on student performance. Emphasis should rather be placed on establishing a positive school/classroom climate for the assessment and, when necessary, mitigating potential anxiety or stress students and teachers may experience during the time leading up to and during the assessment administration. As such, it is important to inform students about the assessment and its purpose and to reassure them that everything they have been learning in school up to this point has prepared them for the assessment. School administrators and teachers are expected to prepare for the assessment by following the administration protocols outlined in the assessment information and administration guides. This document is intended to provide schools with some helpful tips and strategies to set students and teachers up for success when participating in provincial assessments.

### Before the assessment administration

- Administrators/teachers can have a class discussion about the assessment and answer questions or concerns students may have; this may help students feel more comfortable and positive as they engage with the assessment. It is helpful to explain to students, in developmentally appropriate ways, the purpose of the assessment, highlighting how the information gained will be used for planning and decision-making at all levels of the education system, (e.g., classroom, school, region, province). When students understand the purpose of the assessment, they are more likely to try their best.
- Answering questions about the assessment and addressing student anxiety can help prevent emotional upset from compromising test performance. Teachers know their students best, and it will be important to consider their diverse backgrounds and experiences in order to lower anxiety and maintain a calm, safe, and positive learning environment during the assessment time, (e.g., some students may come from families or cultures where testing is very high stakes even though this is not the case with Nova Scotia Assessments).
- School Assessment Coordinators are expected to prepare for the assessment by opening the assessment materials upon arrival to the school and by following the protocols and timelines outlined in the School Assessment Coordinator Checklist, (e.g., check the assessment materials to ensure that the packing slip accurately reflects what is in the package and that there are enough materials for your school, distribute materials to teachers administering the assessment).
- Teachers are expected to prepare for the assessment by following the protocols and timelines outlined in the Teacher Checklist, (e.g., read the Nova Scotia Assessments: Information and Administration guides, distribute the Information for Parents and Guardians pamphlets).
- Teachers are expected to familiarize students with the formats used in provincial assessments. To mitigate an assessment format bias, the Student Assessment and Evaluation Division has created Sample Questions for the assessments. They are available on the PLANS website ([plans.ednet.ns.ca](https://plans.ednet.ns.ca)) under the documents tab of each assessment page. Sample Questions include multiple-choice format and constructed-response format for the writing assessments. It is important to note that these Sample Questions should not be handed out and given as homework or as a silent task for students to work on independently. They are intended to familiarize students with the format of provincial assessments as well as the thinking strategies involved in responding to questions.

- Sample Questions are included on the Nova Scotia Assessment: Read-aloud (NSA-RA) platform for students who are registered for read-aloud adaptations; students should be provided with an opportunity to use the read-aloud platform for Sample Questions so they can become familiar with the platform before the assessment.
- Students are expected to complete the assessment independently. As part of ongoing classroom practice teachers provide students opportunities to work independently. Although students must learn to work collaboratively in group situations, it is also necessary for students to feel confident in their own abilities to work independently. Students need explicit instruction and practice around the skills and strategies for successful independent work.
- Administrators should ensure that all teachers and students in the school are aware of the assessment administration dates even though they are only administered at certain grades and subject areas.
- Teachers should avoid assigning major tests and projects during assessment administration days.

### **During the assessment administration**

- Schools may wish to integrate various elements found to be effective according to brain research. This research has identified several healthy habits to optimize student performance on assessments: physical, mental, social/emotional. Prior to writing an assessment or examination, schools could do the following:
  - engage students in a few minutes of physical activity (e.g., short brisk walk, jumping jacks) to get the blood flowing and “wake up” the brain
  - provide students with a healthy snack (e.g., milk or banana)
  - focus on maintaining a positive, relaxed attitude and learning environment.
- Teachers can remind students that this is not a race to finish; students’ best effort is needed so that the information gained can be used to support student learning and to improve teaching/instruction.
- It is more effective and comforting for students to have a teacher who knows them administering the assessment. Substitute teachers who are familiar with the assessment information guide, administration procedures and scripts can administer an assessment if the students’ teacher is unavailable. Alternatively, a substitute could cover another teacher’s class during the administration of the assessment. Students are more likely to put forth their best effort with a teacher with whom they already have a relationship. Regardless of who administers the assessment, it is critical that the teacher is familiar with the purpose of the assessment, the information guide, administration procedures and scripts prior to the administration.