



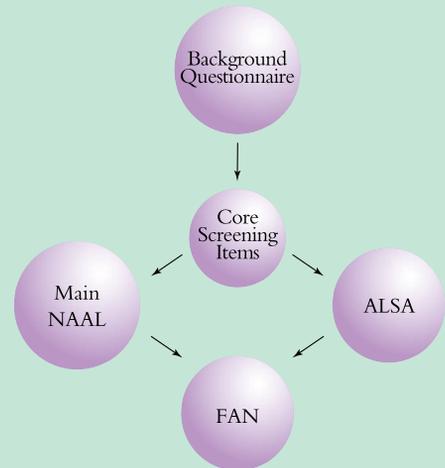
# The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)

In spring 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) began collecting data for the 2003 NAAL, a nationally representative assessment of literacy skills of adults age 16 and older. NAAL is based on an earlier assessment of adult literacy, the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), and includes two new components that allow assessment of basic reading processes for the first time. These new components provide valuable information on the reading skills of the nation's adults, including those who have difficulty using written text.

The first new component, the *Fluency Addition to NAAL (FAN)*, uses speech-recognition software to assess the ability of adults to decode and recognize words and to read with fluency. The second new component, the *Adult Literacy Supplemental Assessment (ALSA)*, assesses the ability of the least-literate adults to read words and comprehend simple prose and documents. A unique feature of ALSA is its use of tangible and highly familiar stimulus materials.

As shown, when NAAL is administered, every respondent receives a background questionnaire and the same sets of core screening items and FAN tasks. Very low performance on the core screening items identifies ALSA respondents. Adults performing above the ALSA cut-off score on the core screening items take the main NAAL. The entire interview takes an average of 90 minutes.

This brochure compares the main NAAL and the new NAAL components. The brochure also provides a brief description of the NAAL Background Questionnaire.





# The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy

	Main NAAL	New NAAL Components	
		Fluency Addition to NAAL (FAN)	Adult Literacy Supplemental Assessment (ALSA)
What are the main purposes of the assessment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the status of literacy among the nation's adults age 16 and over, as measured by their ability to use printed material</li> <li>Describe the status of literacy among adults in each of six participating states: Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, and Oklahoma.</li> <li>Describe the status of literacy among the prison population</li> <li>Measure changes in the levels and distribution of adult literacy over time</li> <li>Enhance understanding of the factors associated with literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the basic reading skills of adults age 16 and over</li> <li>Describe the basic reading skills of the prison population</li> <li>Provide a baseline for measuring future changes in the levels and distribution of adults' basic reading skills over time</li> <li>Enhance understanding of the factors associated with basic reading skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the basic reading skills of the least-literate adults (approximately the lowest 5–10 percent)</li> <li>Describe the basic reading skills of the least-literate adults among the prison population</li> <li>Provide a baseline for measuring future changes in the levels and distribution of the least-literate adults' basic reading skills over time</li> <li>Enhance understanding of the factors associated with basic reading skills of the least-literate adults</li> </ul>
What is being measured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehension and use of printed materials and performance on arithmetic operations using information embedded in text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decoding, word recognition, and reading with fluency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identification of letters and numbers, word recognition, vocabulary, and comprehension of simple prose and documents in English by the least-literate adults</li> </ul>
What are the key features of the instruments being used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Background questionnaire administered in English or Spanish, depending on each respondent's choice; separate version of the background questionnaire tailored for prison population</li> <li>Total pool of 149 assessment questions; each respondent answers 40</li> <li>Written directions for core screening items administered in English or Spanish, depending on each respondent's choice</li> <li>Health literacy score derived from health-related questions embedded throughout NAAL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measures of words-per-minute and reading accuracy</li> <li>Oral directions and questions provided in English or Spanish, depending on each respondent's choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respondents are given tangible stimulus materials, such as food boxes, which are highly familiar</li> <li>Oral directions and questions provided in English or Spanish, depending on each respondent's choice</li> <li>Answers to assessment questions may be provided in Spanish</li> </ul>
How will the data be collected?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Household survey of 19,500 adults starting in spring 2003 (including ALSA respondents and 6,500 respondents from state samples); Blacks and Hispanics oversampled</li> <li>Prison survey of 1,200 state and federal prison inmates</li> <li>Respondents' written answers collected for analysis and scoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Household survey of 19,500 adults starting in spring 2003 (including ALSA respondents and 6,500 respondents from state samples); Blacks and Hispanics oversampled</li> <li>Prison survey of 1,200 state and federal prison inmates</li> <li>Speech-recognition software used to record and analyze respondents' readings of passages and lists of words and numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Household and prison surveys of the lowest performing adults identified by the NAAL core screening items</li> <li>Respondents' oral answers scored by interviewers on the spot</li> <li>Respondents' background knowledge of stimulus materials directly assessed</li> </ul>
What types of reports may be released?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment frameworks</li> <li>Main report (describing findings for the entire sample of adults)</li> <li>Literacy highlights report</li> <li>Technical report</li> <li>Reanalysis of the 1992 data</li> <li>Individual state reports</li> <li>Report on literacy among prison inmates</li> <li>Health literacy report</li> <li>Issue briefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short fluency report</li> <li>Chapters in the main NAAL and technical reports</li> <li>Issue brief</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short ALSA report</li> <li>Chapters in the main NAAL and technical reports</li> <li>Issue brief</li> </ul>
Who is likely to use the data?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policymakers may use information about the levels of literacy demonstrated by all adults and subgroups of adults to justify or support creation or improvement of programs</li> <li>Policymakers can use results to inform workplace literacy programs</li> <li>Policymakers can use results to enhance prison and other literacy programs</li> <li>States can compare the performance of adults in their state with that of adults in other states and the nation</li> <li>Health organizations can use health literacy data to identify the best ways of reaching target audiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policymakers may use information about the basic reading skills of all adults and subgroups of adults to justify or support creation or improvement of programs</li> <li>Adult education providers can use information about basic reading skills to develop more appropriate instruction and courseware for literacy and professional training</li> <li>Researchers can use the data to study the factors associated with different levels of literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policymakers may use information about the basic reading skills of the least-literate adults and subgroups of these adults to justify or support creation or improvement of programs</li> <li>Adult education providers can use information about the least-literate adults' basic reading skills to develop more appropriate instruction and courseware for literacy and professional training</li> <li>Researchers can use the data to study the possible causes of low literacy and develop appropriate remedies</li> </ul>

## The 2003 NAAL Background Questionnaire

The 2003 NAAL Background Questionnaire collects data on a variety of background variables, many of which obtain valuable information not collected in the 1992 survey.

The questionnaire is administered orally using a computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) system, allowing interviewers to target questions to appropriate respondents. Because the questions are targeted, no respondent will answer all of the questions.

The NAAL Background Questionnaire serves three purposes:

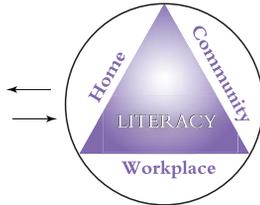
- 1) it provides descriptive data on respondents;
- 2) it enhances understanding of the factors that are associated with literacy skills used at home, at work, or in the community; and
- 3) it allows for the reporting of changes over time.

There are two versions of the NAAL Background Questionnaire: the general version and the version administered to the prison population. The general version contains 10 categories of background questions (see below); the number of questions in each category is shown in parentheses. The other version is tailored to address issues of particular relevance to the prison population.

### Background Categories

(General version of questionnaire)

General & language background (19)  
Education background & experiences (19)  
Political & social participation (12)  
Labor force participation (15)  
Literacy practices (7)  
Job training & skills (10)  
Demographic information (9)  
Family literacy (5)  
Household income & welfare participation (12)  
Health (10)



For more information about NAAL and its components, visit the NAAL web site at <http://nces.ed.gov/NAAL> or contact Sheida White, NAAL Project Director at the National Center for Education Statistics, by e-mail at [Sheida.White@ed.gov](mailto:Sheida.White@ed.gov).

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