



April 2026 Newsletter

April 20, 2026

Nova Scotia Provincial Assessment Info

For the first time this year, the RWM8 assessment will be conducted digitally on a platform called Vretta. I know many of us have some reservations and questions about what this change will look like. This newsletter aims to compile the information and resources I currently have all in one spot, especially since some materials just became live on the PLANS website today.

Access Vretta here: <https://nsa.vretta.com/#/en/login-educator>. Scroll down to “Login with GNSPES.”

Reading, Writing and Mathematics in Grade 8: Key Dates & Resources

The Nova Scotia Assessment: Reading, Writing, and Mathematics/Mathématiques in Grade 8 (RWM8) will be administered in May and June. Students in the French Immersion program write the Mathématiques component of the assessment in French.

New in 2025–26: Grade 8 provincial assessments will be administered through an online platform. The assessment is divided into shorter parts to give schools scheduling flexibility. Classes may write at different times, in the morning or afternoon. Classes may write during their regular ELA or Mathematics class period. Resources for administration will be printed and sent to schools and will also be available mid-April on the Program of Learning Assessments for Nova Scotia website plans.ednet.ns.ca/grade8/documents.

- **RWM8 Assessment Handbook** – information needed to prepare for and administer the assessment.
- **Administrator and Teacher Quick-Start Guides** – technical information for the online assessment platform.
- **RWM8 Sample Assessment Teacher Instructions** – information needed to administer the mandatory sample assessments which familiarize students with the online platform and question formats.
- **Provincial Assessments in Grade 8 flyer** – information about the assessment for families and guardians.

Important Dates

March 1–April 1	Resource Teachers, Administrators	Request paper-based Alternate Formats for eligible students by emailing plans@novascotia.ca by April 1.
April 20–24	Administrator or delegate	Receive and verify contents of school packages. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If packages have not arrived, check with your local Canada Post outlet; then contact Student Assessment at 902.424.7746 or plans@novascotia.ca.• Canada Post: 1.888.550.6333
	Administrators, Teachers	Become familiar with the schedules, procedures, and scripts outlined in the RWM8 Assessment Handbook and the Quick-Start Guides for teachers and administrators.
April 20–30	Administrators, Teachers	Within the online assessment platform: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• complete technical readiness checklist.• manage class sections/groupings.• verify and setup adaptations and participation status.
May 1–15	Teachers	Administer each Sample Assessment (Reading & Writing and Mathematics/Mathématiques) over one or two class periods using the online platform. Distribute the Provincial Assessments in Grade 8 flyer to students to take home to their families/guardians.
May 1–25	Teachers, Administrators, Regional Staff	If interested, submit an Expression of Interest to participate in the Writing in Grade 8 Scoring Session (online) at plans.ednet.ns.ca/professional-opportunities .
May 19–June 9	Teachers	Administer main assessment (Reading, Writing, and Mathematics/Mathématiques in Grade 8) using the online platform. Administer 1–2 parts per day: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading & Writing: 4 parts, 45 minutes each• Mathematics/Mathématiques: 4 parts, 30 minutes each
	School Assessment Coordinator	If applicable, mail alternate format packages by June 9 to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD).
July 20–31	Provincial Staff and Teachers	Scoring Session: Writing in Grade 8 New for 2025–2026, the session will consist of self-paced training and scoring within these dates.

Key Dates for RW8

The key dates document (see above) provides a timeline for teachers and administrators about the items that need to be completed in advance of the assessment. You can find this document linked here

 [PLANS_2025-2026_RWM8_Key_Dates_and_Resources.pdf](#) and below.

Resources from the PLANS Website

The following links and resources are provided on the plans.ednet.ns.ca website.

About the RWM8 Assessment	 Provincial_Assessments_in_Grade_8-Flyer.pdf  PLANS_2025-2026_RWM8_Key_Dates_and_Resources.pdf  RWM8-EN_Overview-2025-2026.pdf
Preparing and Administering RW8	Drop-in Live Support via Google Meet (May 1-June 9, weekdays from 8-10am) Sample Assessment (requires GNSPES login)  RWM8_Assessment_Handbook_2025-2026.pdf  RWM8_Quick-Start_Guide_for_Teachers_2025-2026.pdf [I recommend starting here!]  Online Platform for Provincial Assessments – Guide for Teachers
Interpreting Results RWM8	 NSA-ReadingPerformanceLevels-LM3-RWM6-RWM8_10-2019-EN.pdf  NSA-WritingPerformanceLevels-LM3-RWM6-RWM8_01-2023.pdf  NSA-AnalyticWritingRubric-3-6-8-2022 Annotated-EN (10-2022).pdf  W8_WritingRubricStudentWritingSamplesAndAnnotations(01-2025).pdf  NSA_InformationAboutStudentReports(01-2023).pdf  SAMPLE_RW8-EN(10-2023)_0.pdf

Webinars

There are two webinars being offered on **April 21st (English)** and **April 27th (French)** from 2-3pm. Links will be shared with schools. **I will share recorded sessions** when they are posted on the PLANS website for those of us (most of us) whose day does not end before 2pm. In the meantime, the following two videos from the province provide useful information about the assessment: [Provincial Assessment Program](#) and

[Online Platform for Provincial Assessments – Guide for Teachers](#) .

Webinar Link: [Webinar: Online Assessment Platform for Nova Scotia Provincial Assessments \(hosted by Vretta\)](#)

Accessing & Registering on the Vretta Platform

The

[RWM8_Quick-Start_Guide_for_Teachers_2...](#)

has clear, step-by-step directions for how to log in and set students up in the Vretta platform. I recommend starting with that document.

Student Access

- **Most Students (Chromebooks):** Access via Chrome browser with the **AssessmentLock extension** enabled.

Registration & Adaptations

Registration Details



Beginning **April 20**, registration for the built-in tool will occur directly within the online assessment platform.



Do not use the NSA-RA registration link.

Additional Information About Adaptations



Built-in: Additional time



Built-in: Read-Aloud functionality



Built-in: Change of background colour onscreen



Use of the student's own assistive technology for reading or writing



Other adaptations continue to be available: alternate settings, human-read Read-Aloud, verbatim scribing, and operation charts.



For more information, please contact plans@novascotia.ca.

Extension is being installed by Regional Tech Help Desk.

- **Other Devices (Desktops/ Non-Chromebooks):** Access using the **SafeExamBrowser** application. Also set up by the Regional Tech Help Desk.

Teacher Access

- Log in to the assessment platform via a standard web browser.

Login Credentials:

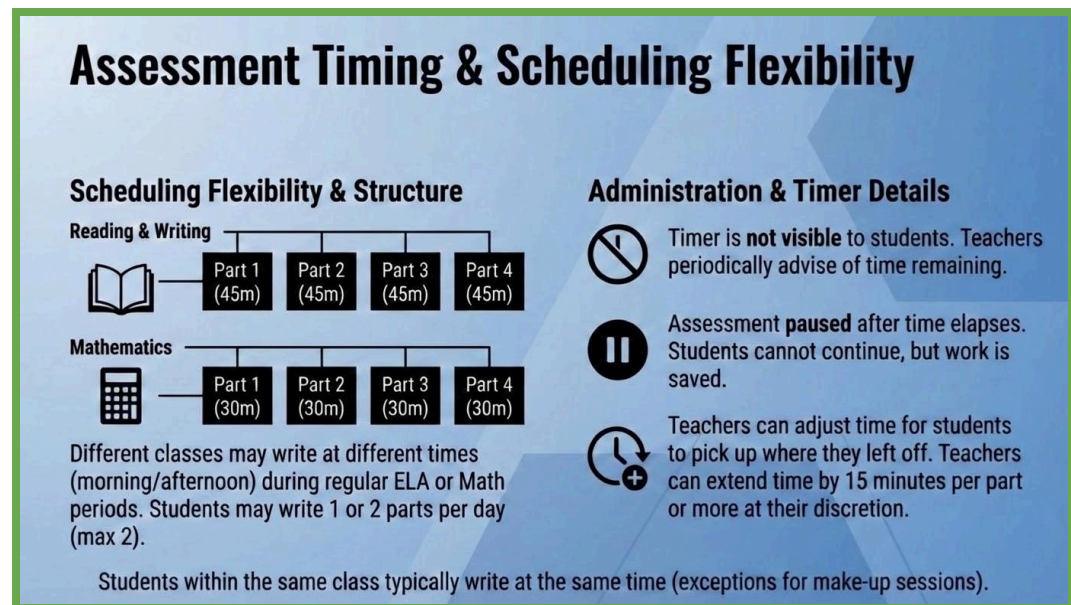
- **Teachers:** Use your **work email**.
- **Students:** Use their **birthdate** and **provincial student number**.

Assessment Timing & Scheduling

While the attached information (see right) has been provided by the province, the details of the assessment will be arranged by each school depending on what works for their teachers, students, and schedule.

International, EAL/FAL, and FLA Students

The following information has been shared from the province:



- Students enrolled in the Nova Scotia International Student Program are expected to participate.
- English or French as an Additional Language (EAL/FAL/FLA) students should participate if proficient to work independently. If proficiency is a barrier, the principal, teachers, student, and family determine exemption.
- Supports available **without** documented adaptation for EAL/FAL/FLA students:
 - **Built-in multilingual translator (one-way):** Translates 3-4 words at a time from English/French to the student's language.
 - **Bilingual dictionary or glossary:** Paper or teacher-monitored device. No personal devices.
 - **Extra time:** Up to double time with supervised breaks.

Displaying Support Materials

The

 RWM8_Assessment_Ha...

Appendix shares clear examples of what is and is not acceptable to have displayed in the room while students are completing their assessments. Any anchor charts students have used throughout the course of the

Appendix B: Guidance for Displaying Support Materials

Anchor charts and other visual supports are helpful teaching tools that can reinforce key ideas and support learning. However, they may affect the fairness of provincial assessments, especially if they include instructions, examples, step-by-step strategies, or, in mathematics, definitions. To keep the assessment valid and meaningful, it's important to think carefully about what these supports show. Visual supports should not take the place of students using their own independent thinking, reasoning, or problem-solving skills. A helpful way to check this is to ask:

- Does it list strategies or steps to follow?
- Does it show an example?
- Does it explain **how** to solve a problem or produce a writing piece?

If the answer is yes, the chart should be covered or removed for the assessment.

 **Literacy examples: may be displayed**

The POWER Cycle

Plan	TIDE
Organize	Topic
Write	Important evidence or reasons
edit	Details
Revise	Ending

This chart is acceptable because it is a reference for students but does not provide the instructional "how-to." Students would need to independently implement these steps.

Don't forget your CAPS!



This chart is acceptable because it serves as a reminder for students to check over their own writing. It does not tell them how to edit their writing or give examples.

TRANSITION WORDS

One day	Suddenly
Long ago	Then when
Last year	When I
When I was...	Finally
After that	Next
And then,	First, then, finally
As soon as	Sometimes

This chart is acceptable because it includes an assorted list of transitional words that students may include in their writing, like a word wall. Students would still need to have an independent understanding of how and when to use transitions effectively in their own writing.

Story Map (narrative)

Setting	Characters
Beginning	Middle
	End

This chart is acceptable because it is a graphic organizer for students to reference as they independently plan their writing.

 **Literacy examples: may not be displayed**

Sentence starter ideas!

Section	Sentence Starters
T Topic	In the story/article... - Title, author - Context - Thesis
I Important evidence or reasons	The first example shows... Another example... Finally...
D Details	This explains... This example shows... This proves... it seems...
E Ending	In conclusion - restate idea All in all... As you can see... To sum up...

This chart is not permitted because it provides guidance on how and when to use sentence starters. To ensure a fair assessment of Organization and Language Use, students need to demonstrate their independent understanding without this type of support.

Quotation Marks

"Want to go to the park?" asked Jamie.

Sachi replied, "Yes! When should we go?"

"Around lunchtime," Jamie said.

"That's a good time for me," Sachi answered. "Just let me ask my nana."

This chart is not permitted because it gives instructions on how to punctuate dialogue correctly. To fairly assess Conventions, students must show what they know and can apply on their own, without instructions.

TRANSITIONS

First...	Then...	Next...	Last
Firstly, To start, First of all, One day,	Now, Secondly, After, As well,	Additionally, Thirdly, To continue, Third of all,	Last of all, Finally, In the end, Fourthly,

OPINIONS

Sentence starters	Other strong words	Concluding words
I think I feel strongly I believe In my opinion	Best Greatest Should, Must All, Every	As you can see, To sum up, In the end, Clearly,

These charts are not permitted because they offer guidance on how and when to use transitional expressions. To ensure a fair assessment of Organization and Language Use, students need to demonstrate their independent understanding of these concepts.

Narrative

1. Small moment	2. Beginning	Middle	End
	- setting - characters - prepare for action to come	- order of events - feelings - transition words - showing not telling	- resolve problem - include feelings - lessons learned
3. Show! (Don't tell!)	Sensory details		
4. Transition words			

This chart is not permitted because it provides guidance on how to organize writing and suggests content ideas. To fairly assess ideas and Organization, students must demonstrate their own independent thinking and planning of writing.

year that **do not explicitly list steps or strategies, show examples, or explain how to complete a piece of writing** are acceptable to have in the classroom. See pages 32-33 of the Handbook.

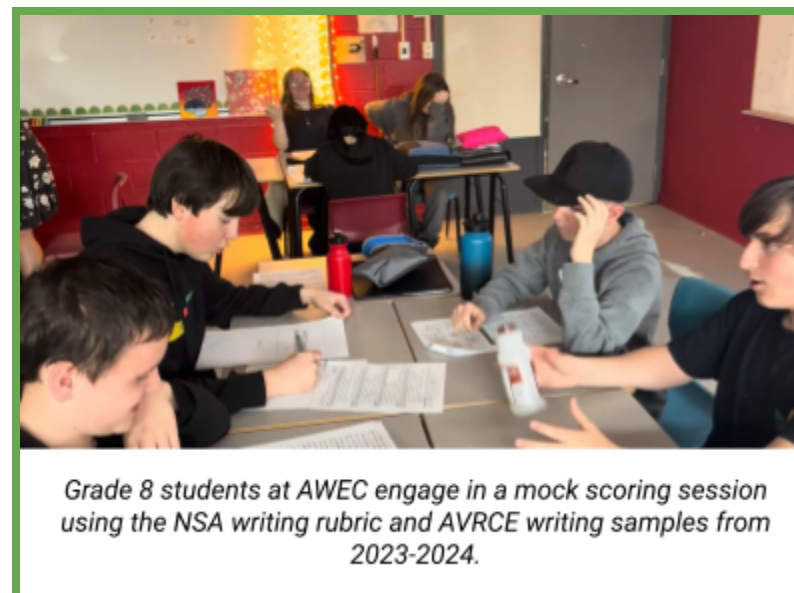
Preparing with Students

Instruction and assessment throughout the year that has been focused on reading analytically and writing using structured organizers (e.g. TIDE, CSPACE) in a variety of genres is enough to prepare most students for the **content** of the assessment. It is worth thinking, however, about certain aspects of the assessment **format** that may be unfamiliar to students.

Some format-related questions to consider:

- Do my students understand selected response questions?
- Are they familiar with the concept of a distractor?
- Do they have an organizing structure in mind that they can **independently** and **quickly** use when planning their writing? (e.g. TIDE/CSPACE)
- Are they familiar with literal, non-literal, and analytical types of questions (even if they can't name them)?

Here are some activities you might try in the coming weeks:



Mock Scoring Session	Grade 8 students are old enough to know exactly how they will be assessed by teachers during this assessment. Using the Nova Scotia Analytic Writing Rubric, “train” students as though they are the teachers	<div>PDF NSA-AnalyticWritingRubr...</div> <div>PDF W8_WritingRubricStuden...</div> <div>Grade 8 Annotated Sam...</div>
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	<p>marking the provincial assessments. Have them circle words that are the same throughout the rubric, underline words that are different, and analyse student samples for Ideas, Organization, Language Use, and Conventions (see PDF W8_WritingRubricStudentWritingSamplesAndAnnota... document if you have never participated in a provincial scoring session). Writing samples from our 2023-2024 regional collaborative assessment work can be used for students to analyse. This is a powerful activity that helps students realize how they will be assessed and what reasonable expectations are for a Grade 8 student to produce in 45 minutes.</p>	
Practice Planning Session	<p>Students often underestimate the importance and value of a completed planner, both when they are writing and when they are being assessed. Provide students with a prompt and 10 minutes to quickly plan a narrative and/or a persuasive essay using a known organizational format (e.g. TIDE/CSPACE) on a blank piece of paper.</p>	
Practice Writing Session	<p>Time management is an executive functioning skill that is still developing for many (most?) middle level students! Provide students with a 45 minute period to complete a practice writing session. During this time, you can periodically guide their time management. For example, at the 10 minute mark, suggest that their planner should be completed and they should begin their writing. At the 20 minute mark, note that they have 25 minutes remaining, and so on. This can be stressful for some students, yes, but so is being unprepared for that feeling on the day of the assessment, during a high school exam,</p>	<p>Note: Both of these instructional documents contain suggested planners that would not be provided to students during the actual assessment.</p> <p>= Copy of RW8 Assessme...</p> <p>= Copy of RW8 Assessme...</p>

	or when facing a work deadline.	
Practicing Selected Response in Various Genres	This document was developed by TCRCE based on a similar document from CBVRCE. It provides sample poetry, visual media, narrative, and informative texts and gives selected response questions for each. It gives opportunities to practice gist statements, and has sample informative and narrative writing prompts at the end using the TIDE and CSPACE organizers.	Teacher Guide: Practice ...

We all have mixed (and valid) feelings about standardized assessments, how or whether to prepare, and how we should best approach this with students to avoid undue anxiety and stress. There is no easy answer to those questions. When I consider these assessments, however, I always try to keep in mind that every jurisdiction in the world has some type of standardized assessment at various checkpoints to take the temperature of their educational system. While their validity and value can be debated, there is no indication that they are going away anytime soon! The best way to reduce anxiety is through clear expectations and preparation in the areas we can anticipate. Hopefully, some of these activities and resources will be helpful to you in the coming weeks and, most importantly, will lead to some engaging and valuable learning opportunities for your students that extend beyond a provincial assessment.



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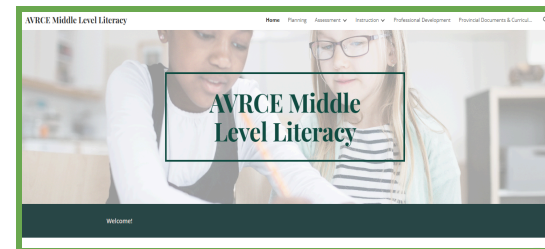
All High Schools
Berwick and District School
Pine Ridge Middle School
Middleton Regional High School
Bridgetown Regional Community School
Annapolis West Education Centre



AVRCE Middle Level Literacy

Google Classroom

Class code: o3jusim



[AVRCE Middle Level Literacy Website](#)