

Reader's Guide

Data underlying the figures

The tables of data on which the figures in this publication are based can be found in the individual volumes of *PISA 2009 Results* as indicated and, in greater detail, on the PISA website (www.pisa.oecd.org).

Five symbols are used to denote missing data:

- a The category does not apply in the country concerned. Data are therefore missing.
- c There are too few observations or no observation to provide reliable estimates (i.e. there are fewer than 30 students or less than 5 schools with valid data).
- m Data are not available. These data were collected but subsequently removed from the publication for technical reasons.
- w Data have been withdrawn or have not been collected at the request of the country concerned.
- x Data are included in another category or column of the table.

Country coverage

This publication features data on 65 countries and economies, including all 34 OECD countries and 31 partner countries and economies (see Figure I.1.1 in *PISA 2009 Results Volume I, What Students Know and Can Do*). The data from another nine partner countries were collected a year later and will be published in 2011.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Reporting student data

The report uses “15-year-olds” as shorthand for the PISA target population. PISA covers students who are aged between 15 years 3 months and 16 years 2 months at the time of assessment and who have completed at least 6 years of formal schooling, regardless of the type of institution in which they are enrolled and of whether they are in full-time or part-time education, whether they attend academic or vocational programmes, and whether they attend public or private schools or foreign schools within the country.

Reporting school data

The principals of the schools in which students were assessed provided information on their schools' characteristics by completing a school questionnaire. Where responses from school principals are presented in this publication, they are weighted so that they are proportionate to the number of 15-year-olds enrolled in the school.

Focusing on statistically significant differences

This publication discusses only differences or changes that are statistically significant.

Categorising student performance

This report uses shorthand to describe students' levels of proficiency in the subjects assessed by PISA:

Top performers are those students proficient at Level 5 or 6 of the assessment

Strong performers are those students proficient at Level 4 of the assessment

Moderate performers are those students proficient at Level 2 or 3 of the assessment

Lowest performers are those students proficient at Level 1 or below of the assessment

Short descriptions of the seven levels of reading proficiency applied in PISA 2009 are presented below. A difference of about 73 score points represents one proficiency level on the PISA reading scale; and one school year corresponds to an average of 39 score points on the PISA reading scale.

Level	Lower score limit	Percentage of students able to perform tasks at this level or above	Characteristics of tasks
6	698	0.8% of students across the OECD can perform tasks at Level 6 on the reading scale	Tasks at this level typically require the reader to make multiple inferences, comparisons and contrasts that are both detailed and precise. They require demonstration of a full and detailed understanding of one or more texts and may involve integrating information from more than one text. Tasks may require the reader to deal with unfamiliar ideas, in the presence of prominent competing information, and to generate abstract categories for interpretations.
5	626	7.6% of students across the OECD can perform tasks at least at Level 5 on the reading scale	Tasks at this level that involve retrieving information require the reader to locate and organise several pieces of deeply embedded information, inferring which information in the text is relevant. Reflective tasks require critical evaluation or hypothesis, drawing on specialised knowledge. Both interpretative and reflective tasks require a full and detailed understanding of a text whose content or form is unfamiliar.
4	553	28.3% of students across the OECD can perform tasks at least at Level 4 on the reading scale	Tasks at this level that involve retrieving information require the reader to locate and organise several pieces of embedded information. Some tasks at this level require interpreting the meaning of nuances of language in a section of text by taking into account the text as a whole. Other interpretative tasks require understanding and applying categories in an unfamiliar context. Readers must demonstrate an accurate understanding of long or complex texts whose content or form may be unfamiliar.
3	480	57.2% of students across the OECD can perform tasks at least at Level 3 on the reading scale	Tasks at this level require the reader to locate, and in some cases recognise the relationship between, several pieces of information that must meet multiple conditions. Interpretative tasks at this level require the reader to integrate several parts of a text in order to identify a main idea, understand a relationship or construe the meaning of a word or phrase. Often the required information is not prominent or there is much competing information, or there are other text obstacles, such as ideas that are contrary to expectation or negatively worded. Other tasks do not require detailed text comprehension but require the reader to draw on less common knowledge.
2	407	81.2% of students across the OECD can perform tasks at least at Level 2 on the reading scale	Some tasks at this level require the reader to locate one or more pieces of information, which may need to be inferred and may need to meet several conditions. Others require recognising the main idea in a text, understanding relationships, or construing meaning within a limited part of the text when the information is not prominent and the reader must make low level inferences. Tasks at this level may involve comparisons or contrasts based on a single feature in the text.
1a	335	94.3% of students across the OECD can perform tasks at least at Level 1a on the reading scale	Tasks at this level require the reader to locate one or more independent pieces of explicitly stated information, to recognise the main theme or author's purpose in a text about a familiar topic, or to make a simple connection between information in the text and common, everyday knowledge. Typically the required information in the text is prominent and there is little, if any, competing information.
1b	262	98.9% of students across the OECD can perform tasks at least at Level 1b on the reading scale	Tasks at this level require the reader to locate a single piece of explicitly stated information in a prominent position in a short, syntactically simple text with a familiar context and text type, such as a narrative or a simple list. The text typically provides support to the reader, such as repetition of information, pictures or familiar symbols. There is minimal competing information. In tasks requiring interpretation, the reader may need to make simple connections between adjacent pieces of information.

Calculating international averages

An OECD average was calculated for most indicators presented in this report. In the case of some indicators, a total representing the OECD area as a whole was also calculated:

- The OECD average corresponds to the arithmetic mean of the respective country estimates.
- The OECD total takes the OECD countries as a single entity, to which each country contributes in proportion to the number of 15-year-olds enrolled in its schools (see Annex B for data). It illustrates how a country compares with the OECD area as a whole.

In this publication, the OECD total is generally used when references are made to the overall situation in the OECD area. Where the focus is on comparing performance across education systems, the OECD average is used. In the case of some countries, data may not be available for specific indicators, or specific categories may not apply. Readers should, therefore, keep in mind that the terms “OECD average” and “OECD total” refer to the OECD countries included in the respective comparisons.

Rounding figures

Because of rounding, some figures in tables may not exactly add up to the totals. Totals, differences and averages are always calculated on the basis of exact numbers and are rounded only after calculation.

If a country is described as falling within a range of percentages, that means that the country's raw percentage (the amount *before* rounding) falls within the range.

All standard errors in this publication have been rounded to two decimal places. Where the value 0.00 is shown, this does not imply that the standard error is zero, but that it is smaller than 0.005.

Abbreviations used in this publication

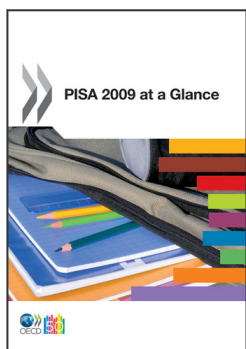
ESCS – PISA index of economic, social and cultural status

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

Further documentation

For further information on the PISA assessment instruments and the methods used in PISA, see the *PISA 2009 Technical Report* (OECD, forthcoming) and the PISA website (www.pisa.oecd.org).

PISA at a Glance uses the OECD's StatLinks service. Below each table and chart is a URL leading to a corresponding Excel™ workbook containing the underlying data. These URLs are stable and will remain unchanged over time. In addition, readers of this e-book will be able to click directly on these links and the workbook will open in a separate window, if their internet browser is open and running.



From:
PISA 2009 at a Glance

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264095298-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2011), "Reader's Guide", in *PISA 2009 at a Glance*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264095250-2-en>

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