

A Guide for Parents and Whānau

Understanding the NCEA Literacy Co-requisite

Reading Understanding written texts

Writing Communicating ideas and information

What the co-requisite requires, and simple, practical things you can do at home to support your child — no teaching background required.

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About This Guide

Every student needs to meet the Literacy and Numeracy Co-requisite before they can be awarded any NCEA qualification, at any level. This is separate from their regular NCEA subject credits — it's a foundation requirement that sits underneath everything else.

Two of the three co-requisite standards cover literacy: one focused on reading (understanding and thinking critically about written texts) and one on writing (communicating clearly in writing). Both are assessed by NZQA through an online exam, sat under normal exam conditions, with results released after each assessment window.

You don't need an English background to help your child prepare. This guide explains what each standard requires, and offers simple suggestions you can build into everyday life at home.

How to use this guide

- Start with “Five Ways to Help at Home” for the easiest ideas.
- Use the reading and writing sections if you want to understand exactly what your child is being assessed on.
- Try one or two ideas at a time rather than everything at once — small, regular habits matter more than a single big effort.
- “Words You Might Hear” explains the terms your child's teachers may use when talking about this requirement.

The Literacy Co-requisite at a Glance

Reading	Writing
Understanding and thinking critically about written texts	Communicating ideas and information clearly in writing
Answering questions about a range of short, real-world texts	Writing two short pieces, plus short questions on spelling, grammar and punctuation
About an hour, sat online in one sitting at school	About an hour, sat online in one sitting at school
Assessed 18–29 May and 07–18 Sept 2026	Assessed 18–29 May and 07–18 Sept 2026

A note on AI and spellcheck tools

- Generative AI, Grammarly, and similar tools aren't allowed in the actual assessment. This means the most useful practice at home is writing and reading without those tools switched on, so your child builds confidence doing it unaided.

Five Ways to Help at Home

None of these need extra time set aside — they fit into things your family is probably already doing.

1. Talk about what you're reading

- When you're reading something together — a text, a notice, an article — ask a quick question: “who do you think wrote this, and why?” It only takes a moment and builds a habit of thinking critically about text.

2. Keep everyday reading normal

- Menus, instructions, timetables, packaging, and notices are all valid reading practice. You don't need to buy a book — everyday texts around the housework just as well.

3. Encourage a little writing, regularly

- A shopping list, a note, a message to a family member — any writing builds fluency. Occasionally ask your child to write something a bit more formal, like a short email, to practise a different tone.

4. Ask them to explain, not just report

- When your child tells you about something they've read or watched, ask them to explain it in their own words, or say what they think the writer wanted the reader to believe. This mirrors exactly what the assessment asks for.

5. Praise the proofread, not just the finished product

- Notice and encourage the habit of checking work over before it's handed in or sent — rather than only praising the end result. This builds the self-editing habit the assessment rewards.

Reading

Understanding written texts

What Your Child Needs to Be Able to Do

Skill area	In plain terms
Understand what they read	• Pick out the important ideas and information in a text • Use headings, layout and other features to help make sense of it • Work out what a tricky word means from the context around it
Think critically about it	• Work out who wrote something, who it's for, and why • Judge whether a text and its writer can be trusted — spotting bias or missing information
Use reading for a purpose	• Decide whether a text is actually useful for what they're trying to find out • Pull together information from more than one text — comparing, summarising, and linking ideas

What the Assessment Looks Like

Your child will answer multiple-choice, matching and labelling questions about at least four short texts, drawn from everyday, real-world situations — job ads, health and safety notices, media coverage, sports events, school or community events, and profiles of people. They'll be asked to find facts, spot what's relevant, identify bias, work out who a text is for, summarise, and compare texts.

Where Students Often Need Support

Based on national results, students most often need support with:

Common challenges

- Reading and making sense of a text on an unfamiliar topic
- Choosing the best answer to a question, not just one that sounds plausible
- Working out why a text was written and who it's really for
- Judging whether a text or writer can be trusted
- Pulling together information from more than one text at once

Ideas to Try at Home

Small, low-pressure ways to build these skills into everyday life.

Talk about everyday texts

- Junk mail, instructions, a recipe, a bus timetable — ask who wrote it, who it's for, and why, the same way you might chat about a news story.

Question what you see online together

- When you're scrolling news or social media together, ask “do you think this is reliable? What makes you say that?” It's a quick habit that builds real critical thinking.

Stretch beyond the comfortable stuff

- Encourage your child to read something a little outside their usual interests occasionally — a different section of the news, a leaflet, instructions for something new. Reading only familiar material doesn't build the same skill.

Ask for a one-sentence summary

- After they've read something — an article, a text, even a set of instructions — ask them to sum it up in one sentence. It's quick, and it's exactly the kind of thinking the assessment rewards.

Writing

Communicating ideas and information

What Your Child Needs to Be Able to Do

Skill area	In plain terms
Write for a real purpose and audience	• Choose the right content and level of detail for who's reading it and why • Organise writing in a way that suits the type of text — a letter, a report, a description • Choose the right tone and register: formal for a letter to an organisation, informal for a message to a friend
Use written conventions correctly	• Write complete, varied sentences • Punctuate and use grammar correctly enough that meaning is clear • Spell everyday, high-frequency words accurately

One of the two pieces your child writes must be formal, and at least one must be a continuous piece of at least 250 words.

What the Assessment Looks Like

Your child writes two pieces of different types — for example a letter, report, article, blog post, or opinion piece — with at least one in a formal style. They'll also answer short questions on spelling, grammar, sentence construction, punctuation and organisation. The topics are everyday and realistic: jobs, health and safety, media, sport, community events, and people or issues in the news.

Where Students Often Need Support

Based on national results, students most often need support with:

Common challenges

- Meeting the actual task — the right length, purpose and audience
- Developing an idea fully rather than leaving it thin
- Organising writing so it flows logically
- Choosing the right register and tone for the task
- Using accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling
- Editing and proofreading before finishing

Ideas to Try at Home

Small, low-pressure ways to build writing skills into everyday life.

Plan before writing anything longer than a text

- Encourage a quick, three-point plan — even just a few words jotted down — before any longer piece of writing. It builds a habit that pays off well beyond the assessment.

Practise switching tone

- Have your child write the same message twice: once as they'd text a friend, once as a formal email. Talk about what changed and why — it's a quick, concrete way to build an ear for register.

Read it aloud before it's finished

- Encourage your child to read their own writing aloud, quietly, before handing it in. It's one of the fastest ways to catch a missing word or a sentence that doesn't quite make sense.

Make proofreading a normal last step

- Build in a habit of a final check — spelling, capital letters, full stops — before anything is sent or submitted, for messages as much as for schoolwork.

Words You Might Hear

A few terms your child's teachers may use when talking about this requirement.

Term	What it means
Co-requisite	A requirement students must meet alongside their subject credits before NCEA can be awarded at any level — separate from the credits they earn in individual subjects.
NZQA	The New Zealand Qualifications Authority — the government body that sets and marks NCEA and this assessment.
Common Assessment Activity (CAA)	The official name for the online exam used to assess this requirement. It is set and marked centrally by NZQA, not by your child's own teacher.
Credits	The Reading and Writing standards are each worth 5 credits, but they work differently from subject credits — your child either meets the co-requisite or doesn't; there's no partial result.
Register	How formal or informal a piece of writing is. A text to a friend is informal; a letter to an organisation is formal.
Credibility / reliability	Whether a source or piece of writing can be trusted — based on things like who wrote it, why, and whether it presents a one-sided view.
Continuous / non-continuous text	Continuous text is written in full sentences and paragraphs (like an article). Non-continuous text presents information differently — lists, tables, charts, or images with some text.

Quick Reference Checklist

A few small, regular habits do better than one big push right before the assessment.

For reading

Try this

- Ask “who wrote this, and why?” about everyday texts — not just schoolwork
- Occasionally read something a bit unfamiliar together
- Ask for a one-sentence summary of something they've just read
- Chat about whether something online seems trustworthy, and why

For writing

Try this

- Encourage a quick plan before anything longer than a text message
 - Practise the same message in a formal and an informal version
 - Encourage reading writing aloud before it's handed in
 - Make a final proofread a normal last step, not an optional extra
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