

What PISA Measures

“PISA assesses the application of knowledge in reading, mathematics, and science literacy to problems within a real-life context (OECD 1999). PISA uses the term “literacy” in each subject area to denote its broad focus on the application of knowledge and skills. For example, when assessing reading, PISA assesses how well 15-year-old students can understand, use, and reflect on written text for a variety of purposes and settings. In science, PISA assesses how well students can apply scientific knowledge and skills to a range of different situations they may encounter in their lives. Likewise, in mathematics, PISA assesses how well students analyze, reason, and interpret mathematical problems in a variety of situations. Scores on the PISA scales represent skill levels along a continuum of literacy skills. PISA provides ranges of proficiency levels associated with scores that describe what a student can typically do at each level . . .”

Fleischman, H. L., P. J. Hopstock, M. P. Pelczar, and B. E. Shelley. *Highlights from PISA 2009: Performance of U.S. 15-Year-Old Students in Reading, Mathematics, and Science Literacy in an International Context*, NCES 2011-004 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010), p. 4.