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Sources for the Historical Study of Literacy in North America and Europe¹

¹ This is a modified and greatly expanded version of Table A, in Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1974).

Source	Measure of literacy	Population	Country of availability	Years of availability	Additional variables
Census	Questions: read and write, read/write Signature/mark (Canada 1851, 1861 only)	Entire "adult" population (in theory): ages variable, e.g., over 20 years, 15 years, 10 years	Canada, United States	Manuscripts: Nineteenth century	Age, sex, occupation, birth- place, religion, marital status, family size and structure, residence, eco- nomic data
Wills	Signature/mark	20-50% of adult males dying; 2-5% of adult females dying	Canada, United States, England, France, etc.	Canada, eighteenth century on, U.S. 1660 on, others from sixteenth- seventeenth cen- tury on	Occupation, charity, family size, residence, estate, sex
Deeds	Signature/mark	5-85% of living landowning adult males; 1% or less of females	Canada, United States	Eighteenth cen- tury on	Occupation, residence, value of land, type of sale
Inventories	Book-ownership	25-60% of adult males dying; 3-10% of adult females dying	Canada, United States, England, France, etc.	Seventeenth- eighteenth cen- tury on (quantity varies by country and date)	Same as wills
Depositions	Signature/mark	Uncertain: potentially more select than wills, potentially wider Women sometimes included	Canada, United States, England, Europe	Seventeenth- eighteenth cen- tury on (use and survival varies)	Potentially, age, occupation, sex, birthplace, residence
Marriage records	Signature/mark	Nearly all (80%+) young men and women marrying (in England)	England, France, North America	From 1754 in England; 1650 in France	Occupation, age, sex, parents' name and occupa- tion, residence (religion— North America)

Catechetical examination records	Reading, memorization, comprehension, writing examinations	Unclear, but seems very wide	Sweden, Finland	After 1620	Occupation, age, tax status, residence, parents' name and status, family size, migration, periodic improvement
Petitions	Signature/mark	Uncertain, potentially very select, males only in most cases	Canada, United States, England, Europe	Eighteenth century on	Occupation or status, sex, residence, political or social views
Military recruit records	Signature/mark or question on reading and writing	Conscripts or recruits (males only)	Europe, esp. France	Nineteenth century	Occupation, health, age, residence, education
Criminal records	Questions: read, read well, etc.	All arrested	Canada, United States, England	Nineteenth century	Occupation, age, sex, religion, birthplace, residence, marital status, moral habits, criminal data
Business records	Signature/mark	1. All employees 2. Customers	Canada, United States, England, Europe	Nineteenth, twentieth century	1. Occupation, wages 2. Consumption level, residence, credit
Library/mechanics institute records	Books borrowed	Members or borrowers	Canada, United States, England	Late eighteenth, early nineteenth century	Names of volumes borrowed, society membership
Applications (land, job, pensions, etc.)	Signature/mark	All applicants	Canada, United States, England, Europe	Nineteenth–twentieth century	Occupation, residence, family/career history, etc.
Aggregate data sources ^a	Questions or direct tests	Varies greatly	Canada, United States, England, Europe	Nineteenth–twentieth century	Any or all of the above

^a Censuses, educational surveys, statistical society reports, social surveys, government commissions, prison and jail records, etc.