

Comparison of Language Proficiency Levels

FSI / ILR Scales, ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, Common European Framework, Canadian Language Benchmarks

For a range of levels of language ability (called proficiency levels) and for the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), several organizations have specified (1) what an individual should be able to do in a second language and (2) how well he/she should be able to do it. The number of levels differs with each organization, and each uses different terms to describe its levels. Four widely used scales are the following:

- ACTFL American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages: <http://www.actfl.org>
- FSI / ILR Foreign Service Institute / Inter-Agency Language Roundtable:
<http://www.utm.edu/~globeg/ilrhome.shtml>
- CLB Canadian Language Benchmarks: <http://www.language.ca>
- CEF Common European Framework: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp

These four sets of guidelines are useful for (1) planning areas of focus and specific activities to include in a learning program and (2) evaluating overall proficiency, including the learners' ability to handle real-life tasks in the new language. *LAMP* and many other language learning publications have modeled their evaluation system on the speaking component of the FSI / ILR scale.

P R O F I C I E N C Y L E V E L	FSI / ILR	ACTFL	Common European Framework	Canadian Language Benchmarks	
	5 (functionally native proficiency)				
4+ (advanced professional profic., plus)		Superior	C-2	Stage 3: Advanced	12
4 (advanced professional proficiency)					11
3+ (general professional profic., plus)			C-1		10
3 (general professional proficiency)		9			
2+ (limited working proficiency, plus)		Advanced High	B-2+	Stage 2: Intermediate	8
2 (limited working proficiency)		Advanced Mid	B-2		7
		Advanced Low	B-1+		6
1+ (elementary proficiency, plus)		Intermediate High	B-1	Stage 1: Basic	5 - 6
1 (elementary proficiency)		Intermediate Mid	A-2+		4
		Intermediate Low			3
0+ (memorized proficiency)		Novice High	A-2		2
0 (no proficiency)		Novice Mid	A-1		2
		Novice Low		1	

Speaking: Overview of Proficiency Levels (using FSI / ILR scale)

Pronunciation	Grammar	Fluency	Comprehensibility
<p>1.5- <i>Often unintelligible</i> due to frequent phonemic errors and foreign stress and intonation patterns.</p>	<p>1.5- <i>Fair control of a few basic</i> grammatical constructions & <i>simple stock phrases</i>.</p>	<p>1.5- Speech is halting and fragmentary with little native flow. Except for memorized expressions, every utterance requires obvious effort.</p>	<p>1.5- Overall comprehensibility is low in even the simplest type of speech.</p>
<p>2.0- <i>Occasionally unintelligible</i> due to phonemic errors and foreign stress and intonation patterns.</p>	<p>2.0- <i>Fair control of basic</i> grammatical constructions. Conveys meaning accurately in <i>simple sentences</i> most of the time, but with major and/or repeated errors. Difficulty with complex sentence structures.</p>	<p>2.0- Usually hesitant. Numerous non-native pauses and/or a non-native flow that interferes with intelligibility. Often forced to silence by limitations of grammar and vocabulary.</p>	<p>2.0- Often <i>not comprehensible</i> because of <i>frequent</i> pauses, rephrasing, pronunciation errors, limited grasp of vocabulary, or lack of grammatical control.</p>
<p>2.5- <i>Usually intelligible</i> in spite of phonemic errors and foreign stress and intonation patterns.</p>	<p>2.5- <i>Good control of basic</i> grammatical constructions, <i>fair control of some complex sentence constructions</i>.</p>	<p>2.5- Sometimes hesitant. Some pauses interfere with intelligibility, but most do not. Slowed down by limitations of grammar, but vocabulary is generally adequate for common topics.</p>	<p>2.5- <i>Usually comprehensible</i> in spite of many pauses, rephrasing or lack of grammatical control. Uses compensating strategies successfully. Pronunciation and vocabulary generally adequate.</p>
<p>3.0- <i>Some consistent errors</i> in pronunciation, stress and intonation patterns, but speaker is <i>always intelligible</i>.</p>	<p>3.0- Generally <i>good control in all</i> constructions. Always conveys meaning accurately in reasonably complex sentences. Some grammatical errors that do not interfere with overall intelligibility.</p>	<p>3.0- Rarely hesitant. Some non-native pauses that do not interfere with intelligibility. Always able to sustain a conversation through circumlocutions.</p>	<p>3.0- <i>Comprehensible</i>, but with some errors in pronunciation, grammar, choice of vocabulary items, or infrequent pauses or rephrasing</p>
<p>4.0- Occasional nonnative pronunciation errors, but speaker is always intelligible.</p>	<p>4.0- Sporadic minor errors that show no pattern of deficiency.</p>	<p>4.0- Speech is smooth and effortless, closely approximating that of a native speaker. Always easy to listen to.</p>	<p>4.0- Completely comprehensible in normal speech with occasional grammatical or pronunciation errors.</p>

Relative Difficulty of Turkish

Relative difficulty for English speakers to learn...

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Group I | Afrikaans, Danish, Dutch, French, Haitian, Creole, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish |
| Group II | Bulgarian, Dari, Farsi, German, Greek, Hindi, Indonesian, Malay, Urdu |
| Group III | <i>Turkish</i> , Amharic, Bengali, Burmese, Czech, Finnish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Lao, Nepali, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Sinhala, Thai, Vietnamese |
| Group IV | Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean |

v1.2

Note 1: This page from version 1.1 has been included to give the general descriptions of the rating scales, and because it shows the division of the Advanced level into only two sections, the way many of the detailed descriptions on the following pages are laid out. ACTFL now uses three sections for the Advanced level (see p.1).

Note 2: The ACTFL scale seems to indicate a higher level of proficiency relative to the other scales because it was developed for teachers of high school and college courses; the goals and expectations for what a student can learn during that period of time are lower.

Comparing ACTFL and FSI (ILR) Proficiency Rating Scales*
v1.1

ACTFL	General Description levels	FSI/ILR levels
Native	Able to speak like an educated native speaker	5
Superior	Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations	4+
		4
		3+
		3
Advanced Plus	Able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability to communicate on concrete topics	2+
Advanced	Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements	2
Intermediate-High	Able to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands	1+
Intermediate-Mid	Able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands	1
Intermediate-Low	Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements	
Novice-High	Able to satisfy immediate needs with learned utterances	0+
Novice-Mid	Able to operate in only a very limited capacity	
Novice-Low	Unable to function in the spoken language	
	No ability whatsoever in the language	0

* FSI = Foreign Service Institute
 ILR = Inter-Language Round table
 ACTFL = American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

The ACTFL scale is actually a composite, which includes FSI and ILR guidelines. ACTFL level labels are somewhat misleading, and they make no attempt to discriminate at higher levels, which they lump together under ‘Superior.’

Operational Proficiency Guidelines for Stage 1 Intermediate-Mid (1.0)

Speaking

- Is functional, but limited to **learned phrases and sentence or slight variations**
- Is able to handle successfully a **limited number of familiar**, interactive, task-oriented and social situations
- Can ask and answer **simple questions**
- Can initiate and respond to **simple statements**
- Can maintain a **face-to-face conversation**, although in a highly restricted manner and with much linguistic inaccuracy
- With **repetition**, can generally be understood by sympathetic listeners
- Within these limitations, can perform such **functions** as:
 - basic shopping
 - making purchases
 - using public transportation
 - introducing self
 - giving simple descriptions of objects and people
 - ordering a meal
 - asking directions

Listening

- Must often have a native speaker must often use **slowed speech, repetition, paraphrases**, or a combination of these to be understood
- Understands **simple, short, familiar** utterances
- Understands **main ideas**
- Is able to understand sentence-length utterances that consist of **recombinations of learned elements** in a limited number of context areas, particularly if **strongly supported by visuals or context**, in areas such as:
 - basic personal background
 - basic personal needs
 - social conventions
 - routine tasks
 - meals
 - lodging
 - transportation
 - basic time (maybe)
 - simple directions

Reading

- Is able to read and understand **known language elements** that have been **recombined** in new ways to achieve different meanings at a **similar level of simplicity**
- Can read common public **signs**

Writing

- Can take **dictation** of **familiar sentences** and **vocabulary**

Pronunciation

- Has good pronunciation of memorized and drilled sentences
- Knows which sounds are troublesome

Operational Proficiency Guidelines for Stage 2 Advanced (2.0)

Speaking:

- 9 Has fair control of **most basic sentence patterns**
- 9 Can narrate and describe in **past, present** and **future** time
- 9 Can speak in whole **paragraphs** rather than in short sentences only
- 9 Can participate fully and appropriately in **casual conversations**
- 9 Can deal appropriately with **complications** one might encounter in living in the target culture (e.g., complaints, emergencies)
- 9 Can satisfy speaking requirements of **study** and **work situations**.
- 9 Can clarify meanings when **negotiation** is required
- 9 Able to satisfy the requirements of **everyday situations** and **routine study requirements** of limited scope
- 9 Can handle with confidence but not with facility **complicated tasks** and **social situations**, such as elaborating, complaining and apologizing
- 9 Can narrate and describe with some details, **linking sentences together** smoothly
- 9 Can communicate facts and talk casually about **topics of current public and personal interest**, using general vocabulary
- 9 Can often smooth over shortcomings by using **communicative strategies**, such as pauses, stalling devices and different rates of speech
- 9 Can very often use **circumlocution** (which arises from vocabulary or syntactic limitations) quite successfully, though some groping for words may still be evident
- 9 Can be understood without difficulty by native speakers **80 percent** of the time

Listening:

- 9 Is able to understand **main ideas** and **most details of connected discourse** on a variety of general topics beyond the immediacy of the situation
- 9 May have **uneven comprehension** due to a variety of linguistic and other factors, especially unfamiliarity with the topic.
- 9 Can use listening texts which may have **some complex language forms**, and which may include description and narration, such as interviews, short lectures on familiar topics, news items and reports dealing primarily with factual information
- 9 Is **aware of cohesive devices** but may not be able to use them to follow the sequence of thought

Reading:

- 9 Is able to read prose of **several paragraphs** in length, particularly if presented with a clear underlying structure
- 9 Can read prose texts on familiar topics that mostly use familiar, high-frequency sentence patterns
- 9 Reads texts that include descriptions and narrations, such as simple short stories, news items, bibliographical information, social notices, personal correspondence, routine business letters, and simple technical material written for the general reader
- 9 Gets the **main ideas and some facts** but misses some details
- 9 Comprehends not only due to knowledge of the situation and the subject matter, but also because of increasing understanding of the language

Writing:

- 9 Able to write routine **social correspondence** and join sentences in simple discourse of at least several paragraphs in length on familiar topics
- 9 Can write simple social correspondence, take notes, write cohesive summaries and resumes, as well as narratives and descriptions of a factual nature
- 9 Has sufficient writing vocabulary to express self simply with some circumlocution
- 9 May still make errors in punctuation, spelling, or the formation of non-alphabetic symbols
- 9 Good control of the morphology and the most frequently used syntactic structures (e.g., common word-order patterns, coordination, and subordination), but makes frequent errors in producing complex sentences
- 9 Uses a limited number of cohesive devices, such as pronouns, accurately
- 9 Writing may **resemble literal translations** from the native language, but a sense of organization (rhetorical structure) is emerging
- 9 Writing is understandable to natives not used to the writing of non-natives

Operational Proficiency Guidelines for Stage 3 Advanced Plus (2.5)

Speaking:

- 9 Converses in a clearly participatory fashion
- 9 Can initiate, sustain and bring to closure a wide variety of communicative tasks, including those that require an increased ability to convey meaning with diverse strategies due to a complication or an unforeseen turn of events
- 9 Can narrate and describe with paragraph-length connected discourse
- 9 Is able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday and work situations
- 9 Can discuss concrete topics of particular interests and special fields of competence
- 9 Has an emerging ability to support opinions, explain in detail and hypothesize
- 9 Can compensate for imperfect grasp of some forms with confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing and circumlocution
- 9 Vocabulary and intonation are effectively used to communicate fine shades of meaning
- 9 Fluency may still break down under demands of higher level tasks

Listening:

- 9 Can understand the main idea and details of connected discourse on a variety of topics beyond the immediacy of the situation, including unexpected sequences of events
- 9 In areas of special interest or knowledge, can understand parts of texts which are conceptually or linguistically complex
- 9 Shows an emerging awareness of culturally implied meanings beyond the surface meanings of the text, but may fail to grasp socio-cultural nuances of the message

Reading:

- 9 With consistent understanding, is able to read prose several paragraphs in length, dealing primarily with factual information and intended for the general reader
- 9 Is able to understand parts of texts which are conceptually abstract and linguistically complex, which deal with unfamiliar topics and situations, and which require cultural understanding
- 9 Is able to make sensible guesses about unfamiliar material using linguistic context and real-world knowledge
- 9 Has a broad, active reading vocabulary
- 9 Has an emerging awareness of the aesthetic properties of language and of its literary styles, permitting comprehension of a wider variety of texts, including literary
- 9 Weaknesses include slowness, uncertainty and inability to discern nuances and/or intentionally disguised meaning; misunderstandings may occur

Writing:

- 9 Is able to write narratives and descriptions of a factual nature of at least several paragraphs in length on familiar topics
- 9 Is able to write about a variety of topics with significant precision and in detail
- 9 Can write most social and informal business correspondence
- 9 Can describe and narrate concrete aspects of topics relating to personal experience, particular interests and special fields of competence
- 9 Has difficulty supporting points of view in written discourse
- 9 Often shows remarkable fluency and ease of expressions, but under time constraints and pressure, writing may be inaccurate
- 9 Is generally strong in either grammar or vocabulary, but not both; weakness and unevenness in one of the foregoing may result in occasional miscommunication

Operational Proficiency Guidelines for Stage 4 Superior (3.0)

Speaking:

- 9 Is able to speak the language with **sufficient accuracy to participate effectively in most** formal and informal conversations on practical, social, professional and abstract topics
- 9 Can discuss special fields of competence and interest with **ease**
- 9 Can **support opinions and hypothesize**, but may not be able to tailor language to audience or discuss in depth highly abstract or unfamiliar topics
- 9 Commands a wide variety of **interactive strategies**, and shows good awareness of **discourse strategies**, which involve the ability to distinguish main ideas from supporting information based on sentence structure, vocabulary, pitch, stress or intonation
- 9 **Sporadic errors** may occur, particularly in low-frequency structures and some complex high-frequency structures more common to formal writing. Occasional patterned errors occur in low frequency and highly complex structures.
- 9 **Errors do not disturb** the native speaker or interfere with communication.
- 9 Typically, there is a **particular strength in fluency** and one or more, but not all of the following:
 - ***Broad vocabulary**, including items of low and medium frequencies, especially socio-linguistic references and nuances of close synonyms
 - ***Grammatical** precision, with sophisticated features that are readily, accurately and appropriately controlled
 - ***Discourse** competence in a wide range of contexts and tasks, often matching a native speaker's strategic and organization abilities and expectations
- 9 Is usually only partially familiar with regional or other dialectical variants

Listening:

- 9 Understands face-to-face speech delivered with **normal clarity and speed in a standard dialect**, on general topics and areas of special interest, including technical discussion in a field of specialization
- 9 Follows the essentials of extended discourse which is propositionally and linguistically **complex**, as in academic/professional settings, in lectures, speeches, and reports
- 9 Understands **hypothesizing and supported opinions**
- 9 Understanding is aided by an awareness of the **underlying organizational structure** of the oral text, including **sensitivity to its social and cultural references and its emotional overtones**
- 9 May not understand excessively rapid, highly colloquial speech or speech that has strong cultural references
- 9 Has **broad enough vocabulary** so that requests for paraphrasing or explanation are rare
- 9 Shows some appreciation of aesthetic norms of Turkish, of idioms, colloquialisms and shifting levels of formality
- 9 Can follow accurately the essentials in conversations between educated native speakers, reasonably clear telephone calls, radio broadcasts, news stories similar to wire service reports, oral reports, some oral technical reports, and public addresses on non-technical subjects

Reading:

- 9 Is able to read with **almost complete comprehension** and at **normal speed** expository prose on unfamiliar subjects and a variety of literary texts
- 9 Reading ability is not dependent on subject-matter knowledge, although the reader is not expected to comprehend thoroughly texts which are highly dependent on knowledge of the target culture or which is outside his general experience and not accompanied by explanation.
- 9 Reads easily for **pleasure**
- 9 Is almost always able to interpret material correctly, relate ideas, and read between the lines
- 9 Due to the control of general vocabulary and structure, is almost always able to match the meanings derived from knowledge of the language, allowing for smooth and efficient reading of diverse texts
- 9 **Rarely has to pause over or reread** general vocabulary
- 9 **Occasional misunderstandings** may still occur; for example, the reader may experience some difficulty with unusually complex structures and low-frequency idioms.
- 9 Gets the **gist of more sophisticated texts** but may be unable to detect or understand subtlety and nuance
- 9 Can choose strategies (top-down* or bottom-up*) which are most appropriate to the text
 - *Top-down strategies: relying on real-world knowledge and prediction based on genre and organization scheme of the text
 - *Bottom-up strategies: relying on actual linguistic knowledge
- 9 Material at this level will include a variety of literary texts, news stories similar to wire-service reports or news items in major periodicals, editorials, correspondence, general reports and technical material in professional fields
- 9 Superior level texts feature hypotheses, argumentation and supported opinions and include grammatical patterns and vocabulary ordinarily encountered in academic/professional reading

Writing

- 9 Is able to **express self effectively** in most formal and informal writing on practical, social and professional topics.
- 9 Can write **most types of correspondence**, such as memos as well as social and business letters, and short research papers and statements of position in areas of special interest or in special fields.
- 9 Good control of a full range of structures and spelling, and a wide general vocabulary allow the writer to hypothesize and present arguments or points of view accurately and effectively.
- 9 An underlying **organization**, such as chronological ordering, logical ordering, cause and effect, comparison, and thematic development is strongly evident, although not thoroughly executed and/or not totally reflecting target-language patterns.
- 9 Although sensitive to differences in form and informal style, may still not tailor writing precisely to a variety of purposes and/or readers. Errors in writing rarely disturb natives or cause miscommunication.

ACTFL GENERIC DESCRIPTIONS – SPEAKING

NOVICE LOW

Speakers at the Novice-Low level have no real functional ability and, because of their pronunciation, they may be unintelligible. Given adequate time and familiar cues, they may be able to exchange greetings, give their identity, and name a number of familiar objects from their immediate environment. They are unable to perform functions or handle topics pertaining to the Intermediate level, and cannot therefore participate in a true conversational exchange.

NOVICE MID

Speakers at the Novice-Mid level communicate minimally and with difficulty by using a number of isolated words and memorized phrases limited by the particular context in which the language has been learned. When responding to direct questions, they may utter only two or three words at a time or an occasional stock answer. They pause frequently as they search for simple vocabulary or attempt to recycle their own and their interlocutor's words. Because of hesitations, lack of vocabulary, inaccuracy, or failure to respond appropriately, Novice-Mid speakers may be understood with great difficulty even by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives. When called on to handle topics by performing functions associated with the Intermediate level, they frequently resort to repetition, words from their native language, or silence.

NOVICE HIGH

Speakers at the Novice-High level are able to handle a variety of tasks pertaining to the Intermediate level, but are unable to sustain performance at that level. They are able to manage successfully a number of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations. Conversation is restricted to a few of the predictable topics necessary for survival in the target language culture, such as basic personal information, basic objects and a limited number of activities, preferences and immediate needs. Novice-High speakers respond to simple, direct questions or requests for information; they are able to ask only a very few formulaic questions when asked to do so.

Novice-High speakers are able to express personal meaning by relying heavily on learned phrases or recombinations of these and what they hear from their interlocutor. Their utterances, which consist mostly of short and sometimes incomplete sentences in the present, may be hesitant or inaccurate. On the other hand, since these utterances are frequently only expansions of learned material and stock phrases, they may sometimes appear surprisingly fluent and accurate. These speakers' first language may strongly influence their pronunciation, as well as their vocabulary and syntax when they attempt to personalize their utterances. Frequent misunderstandings may arise but, with repetition or rephrasing. Sympathetic interlocutors used to non-natives can generally understand novice-High speakers. When called on to handle simply a variety of topics and perform functions pertaining to the Intermediate level, a Novice-High speaker can sometimes respond in intelligible sentences, but will not be able to sustain sentence level discourse.

INTERMEDIATE LOW

Speakers at the Intermediate-Low level are able to handle successfully a limited number of uncomplicated communicative tasks by creating with the language in straightforward social situations. Conversation is restricted to some of the concrete exchanges and predictable topics necessary for survival in the target-language culture. These topics relate to basic personal information covering, for example, self and family, some daily activities and personal preferences, as well as to some immediate needs, such as ordering food and making simple purchases. At the Intermediate-Low level, speakers are primarily reactive and struggle to answer direct questions or requests for information, but they are also able to ask a few appropriate questions.

Intermediate-Low speakers express personal meaning by combining and recombining into short statements what they know and what they hear from their interlocutors. Their utterances are often filled with hesitancy and inaccuracies as they search for appropriate linguistic forms and vocabulary while attempting to give form to the message. Their speech is characterized by frequent pauses, ineffective reformulating and self-corrections. Their pronunciation, vocabulary and syntax are strongly influenced by their first language but, in spite of frequent misunderstandings that require repetition or rephrasing, Intermediate-Low speakers can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors, particularly by those accustomed to dealing with non-natives.

INTERMEDIATE MID

Speakers at the Intermediate-Mid level are able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations. Conversation is generally limited to those predictable and concrete exchanges necessary for survival in the target culture; these include personal information covering self, family, home, daily activities, interests and personal preferences, as well as physical and social needs, such as food, shopping, travel and lodging.

Intermediate-Mid speakers tend to function reactively, for example, by responding to direct questions or requests for information. However, they are capable of asking a variety of questions when necessary to obtain simple information to satisfy basic needs, such as directions, prices and services. When called on to perform functions or handle topics at the Advanced level, they provide some information but have difficulty linking ideas, manipulating time and aspect, and using communicative strategies, such as circumlocution.

Intermediate-Mid speakers are able to express personal meaning by creating with the language, in part by combining and recombining known elements and conversational input to make utterances of sentence length and some strings of sentences. Their speech may contain pauses, reformulating and self-corrections as they search for adequate vocabulary and appropriate language forms to express themselves. Because of inaccuracies in their vocabulary and/or pronunciation and/or grammar and syntax, misunderstandings can occur, but Intermediate-Mid speakers are generally understood by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives.

INTERMEDIATE HIGH

Intermediate-High speakers are able to converse with ease and confidence when dealing with most routine tasks and social situations of the Intermediate level. They are able to handle successfully many uncomplicated tasks and social situations requiring an exchange of basic information related to work, school, recreation, particular interests and areas of competence, though hesitation and errors may be evident.

Intermediate-High speakers handle the tasks pertaining to the Advanced level, but they are unable to sustain performance at that level over a variety of topics. With some consistency, speakers at the Intermediate-High level narrate and describe in major time frames using connected discourse of paragraph length. However, their performance of these Advanced-level tasks will exhibit one or more features of breakdown, such as the failure to maintain the narration or description -semantically or syntactically- in the appropriate major time frame, the disintegration of connected discourse, the misuse of cohesive devices, a reduction in breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary, the failure to successfully circumlocate, or a significant amount of hesitation.

Intermediate-High speakers can generally be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, although the dominant language is still evident (e.g., use of code-switching, false cognates, literal translation, etc.), and gaps in communication may occur.

ADVANCED LOW

Speakers at the Advanced-Low level are able to handle a variety of communicative tasks, although somewhat haltingly at times. They participate actively in most informal and a limited number of formal conversations on activities related to school, home and leisure activities and, to a lesser degree, those related to events of work, current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance.

Advanced-Low speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present and future) in paragraph-length discourse, but control of aspect may be lacking at times. They can handle appropriately the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar, though at times their discourse may be minimal for the level and strained. Communicative strategies such as rephrasing and circumlocution may be employed in such instances. In their narrations and descriptions, they combine and link sentences into connected discourse of paragraph length. When pressed for a fuller account, they tend to grope and rely on minimal discourse. Their utterances are typically not longer than a single paragraph. Structure of the dominant language is still evident in the use of false cognates, literal translations, or the oral paragraph structure of the speaker's own language rather than that of the target language.

While the language of Advanced-Low speakers may be marked by substantial -albeit irregular- flow, it is typically somewhat strained and tentative, with noticeable self-correction and a certain "grammatical roughness." The vocabulary of Advanced-Low speakers is primarily generic in nature.

Advanced-Low speakers contribute to the conversation with sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion, and it can be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, even though this may be achieved through repetition and restatement. When attempting to perform functions or handle topics associated with the Superior level, the linguistic quality and quantity of their speech will deteriorate significantly.

ADVANCED MID

Speakers at the Advanced-Mid level are able to handle with ease and confidence a large number of communicative tasks. They participate actively in most informal and some formal exchanges on a variety of concrete topics relating to work, school, home, and leisure activities, as well as to events of current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance.

Advanced-Mid speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present, and future) by providing a full account, with good control of aspect, as they adapt flexibly to the demands of the conversation. Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse.

Advanced-Mid speakers can handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar. Communicative strategies such as circumlocution or rephrasing are often employed for this purpose. The speech of Advanced-Mid speakers performing Advanced-level tasks is marked by substantial flow. Their vocabulary is fairly extensive although primarily generic in nature, except in the case of a particular area of specialization or interest. Dominant language discourse structures tend to recede, although discourse may still reflect the oral paragraph structure of their own language rather than that of the target language.

Advanced-Mid speakers contribute to conversations on a variety of familiar topics, dealt with concretely, with much accuracy, clarity and precision, and they convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion. They are readily understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives. When called on to perform functions or handle topics associated with the Superior level, the quality and/or quantity of their speech will generally decline. Advanced-Mid speakers are often able to state an opinion or cite conditions; however, they lack the ability to consistently provide a structured argument in extended discourse. Advanced-Mid speakers may use a number of delaying strategies, resort to narration, description, explanation or anecdote, or simply attempt to avoid the linguistic demands of Superior-level tasks.

ADVANCED HIGH

Speakers at the Advanced-High level perform all Advanced-level tasks with linguistic ease, confidence and competence. They are able to consistently explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames. In addition, Advanced-High speakers handle the tasks pertaining to the Superior level but cannot sustain performance at that level across a variety of topics. They can provide a structured argument to support their opinions, and they may construct hypotheses, but patterns of error appear. They can discuss some topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests and special fields of expertise, but in general, they are more comfortable discussing a variety of topics concretely.

Advanced-High speakers may demonstrate a well-developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms or for limitations in vocabulary by the confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, and illustration. They use precise vocabulary and intonation to express meaning and often show great fluency and ease of speech. However, when called on to perform the complex tasks associated with the Superior level over a variety of topics, their language will at times break down or prove inadequate, or they may avoid the task altogether, for example, by resorting to simplification through the use of description or narration in place of argument or hypothesis.

SUPERIOR

Speakers at the Superior level are able to communicate in the language with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives. They discuss their interests and special fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency and accuracy. They explain their opinions on a number of topics of importance to them, such as social and political issues, and

provide structured argument to support their opinions. They are able to construct and develop hypotheses to explore alternative possibilities. When appropriate, they use extended discourse without unnaturally lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract elaborations. Such discourse, while coherent, may still be influenced by the Superior speakers' own language patterns, rather than those of the target language.

Superior speakers command a variety of interactive and discourse strategies, such as turn-taking and separating main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic and lexical devices, as well as innovational features such as pitch, stress and tone. They demonstrate virtually no pattern of error in the use of basic structures. However, they may make sporadic errors, particularly in low-frequency structures and in some complex high-frequency structures more common to formal speech and writing. Such errors, if they do occur, do not distract the native interlocutor or interfere with communication.

ACTFL GENERIC DESCRIPTIONS - LISTENING

These guidelines assume that all listening tasks take place in an authentic environment at a normal rate of speech using standard or near-standard norms.

NOVICE

Novice-Low

Understanding is limited to occasional isolated words, such as cognates, borrowed words, and high-frequency social conventions. Essentially no ability to comprehend even short utterances.

Novice-Mid

Able to understand some short, learned utterances, particularly where context strongly supports understanding and speech is clearly audible. Comprehends some words and phrases from simple questions, statements, high-frequency commands and courtesy formulae about topics that refer to basic personal information or the immediate physical setting. The listener requires long pauses for assimilation and periodically requests repetition and/or a slower rate of speech.

Novice-High

Able to understand short, learned utterances and some sentence-length utterances, particularly where context strongly supports understanding and speech is clearly audible. Comprehends words and phrases from simple questions, statements, high-frequency commands and courtesy formulae. May require repetition, rephrasing and/or a slowed rate of speech for comprehension.

INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate-Low

Able to understand sentence-length utterances, which consist of recombinations of learned elements in a limited number of content areas, particularly if strongly supported by the situational context. Content refers to basic personal background and needs, social conventions and routine tasks, such as getting meals and receiving simple instructions and directions. Listening tasks pertain primarily to spontaneous face-to-face conversations. Understanding is often uneven; repetition and rewording may be necessary. Misunderstandings in both main ideas and details arise frequently

Intermediate-Mid

Able to understand sentence-length utterances, which consist of recombinations of learned utterances on a variety of topics. Content continues to refer primarily to basic personal background and needs, social conventions and somewhat more complex tasks, such as lodging, transportation, and shopping. Additional content areas include some personal interests and activities, and a greater diversity of instructions and directions. Listening tasks not only pertain to spontaneous face-to-face conversations but also to short routine telephone conversations and some deliberate speech, such as simple announcements and reports over the media. Understanding continues to be uneven.

Intermediate-High

Able to sustain understanding over longer stretches of connected discourse on a number of topics pertaining to different times and places; however, understanding is inconsistent due to failure to grasp main ideas and/or details. Thus, while topics do not differ significantly from those of an Advanced-level listener, comprehension is less in quantity and poorer in quality.

ADVANCED

Advanced

Able to understand main ideas and most details of connected discourse on a variety of topics beyond the immediacy of the situation. Comprehension may be uneven due to a variety of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors, among which topic familiarity is very prominent. These texts frequently involve description and narration in different time frames or aspects, such as present, nonpast, habitual, or imperfective. Texts may include interviews, short lectures on familiar topics and news items and reports primarily dealing with factual information. Listener is aware of cohesive devices but may not be able to use them to follow the sequence of thought in an oral text.

Advanced-High

Able to understand the main ideas of most speech in a standard dialect; however, the listener may not be able to sustain comprehension in extended discourse which is propositionally and linguistically complex. Listener shows an emerging awareness of culturally implied meanings beyond the surface meanings of the text but may fail to grasp socio-cultural nuances of the message.

SUPERIOR

Able to understand the main ideas of all speech in a standard dialect, including technical discussion in a field of specialization. Can follow the essentials of extended discourse, which is propositionally and linguistically complex, as in academic/professional settings, in lectures, speeches, and reports. Listener shows some appreciation of aesthetic norms of target language, of idioms, colloquialisms and register shifting. Able to make inferences within the cultural framework of the target language. Understanding is aided by an awareness of the underlying organizational structure of the oral text and includes sensitivity for its social and cultural references and its affective overtones. Rarely misunderstands but may not understand excessively rapid, highly colloquial speech or speech that has strong cultural references.

DISTINGUISHED

Able to understand all forms and styles of speech pertinent to personal, social and professional needs tailored to different audiences. Shows strong sensitivity to social and cultural references and aesthetic norms by processing language from within the cultural framework. Texts include theater plays, screen productions, editorials, symposia, academic debates, public policy statements, literary readings, and most jokes and puns. May have difficulty with some dialects and slang.

ACTFL GENERIC DESCRIPTIONS – **READING**

These guidelines assume all reading texts to be authentic and legible.

NOVICE

Novice-Low

Able occasionally to identify isolated words and/or major phrases when strongly supported by context.

Novice-Mid

Able to recognize the symbols of an alphabetic and/or syllabic writing system and/or a limited number of characters in a system that uses characters. The reader can identify an increasing number of highly conceptualized words and/or phrases including cognates and borrowed words, where appropriate. Material understood rarely exceeds a single phrase at a time, and rereading may be required.

Novice-High

Has sufficient control of the writing system to interpret written language in areas of practical need. Where vocabulary has been learned, can read for instructional and directional purposes standardized messages, phrases or expressions, such as some items on menus, schedules, timetables, maps, and signs. At times, but not on a consistent basis, the Novice-High level reader may be able to derive meaning from material at a slightly higher level where context and/or extra-linguistic background knowledge are supportive.

INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate-Low

Able to understand main ideas and/or some facts from the simplest connected texts dealing with basic personal and social needs. Such texts are linguistically non-complex and have a clear internal structure, for example chronological sequencing. They impart basic information about which the reader has to make only minimal suppositions or to which the reader brings personal interest and/or knowledge. Examples include messages with social purposes or information for the widest possible audience, such as public announcements and short, straightforward instructions dealing with public life. Some misunderstandings will occur.

Intermediate-Mid

Able to read consistently with increased understanding simple, connected texts dealing with a variety of basic and social needs. Such texts are still linguistically non-complex and have a clear underlying internal structure. They impart basic information about which the reader has to make minimal suppositions and to which the reader brings personal interest and/or knowledge. Examples may include short, straightforward descriptions of persons, places, and things written for a wide audience.

Intermediate-High

Able to read consistently with full understanding simple, connected texts dealing with basic personal and social needs about which the reader has personal interest and/or knowledge. Can get some main ideas and information from texts at the next higher level featuring description and narration. Structural complexity may interfere with comprehension; for example, basic grammatical relations may be misinterpreted and temporal references may rely primarily on lexical items. Has some difficulty with the cohesive factors in discourse, such as matching pronouns with referents. While texts do not differ significantly from those at the Advanced level, comprehension is less consistent. May have to read material several times for understanding.

ADVANCED

Advanced

Able to read somewhat longer prose of several paragraphs in length, particularly if presented with a clear underlying structure. The prose is predominantly in familiar sentence patterns. Reader gets the main ideas and facts and misses some details. Comprehension derives not only from situational and subject-matter knowledge but also from increasing control of the language. Texts at this level include descriptions and narrations such as simple short stories, news items, bibliographical information, social notices, personal correspondence, routine business letters and simple technical material written for the general reader.

Advanced-High

Able to follow essential points of written discourse at the Superior level in areas of special interest or knowledge. Able to understand parts of texts which are conceptually abstract and linguistically complex, and/or texts which treat unfamiliar topics and situations, as well as some texts which involve aspects of target-language culture. Able to comprehend the facts to make appropriate inferences. An emerging awareness of the aesthetic properties of language and of its literary styles permits comprehension of a wider variety of texts, including literary. Misunderstandings may occur.

SUPERIOR

Able to read, with almost complete comprehension and at normal speed, expository prose on unfamiliar subjects and a variety of literary texts. Reading ability is not dependent on subject-matter knowledge, although the reader is not expected to thoroughly comprehend texts, which are highly dependent on knowledge of the target culture. Reads easily for pleasure. Superior-level texts feature hypotheses, argumentation and supported opinions and include grammatical patterns and vocabulary ordinarily encountered in academic/professional reading. At this level, due to the control of general vocabulary and structure, the reader is almost always able to match the meanings derived from extra-linguistic knowledge with meanings derived from the knowledge of the language, allowing for smooth and efficient reading of diverse texts.

Occasional misunderstandings may still occur; for example, the reader may experience some difficulty with unusually complex structures and low-frequency idioms. At the Superior level, the reader can match strategies, top-down or bottom-up, which are most appropriate to the text. (Top-down strategies rely on real-world knowledge and prediction based on genre and organizational scheme of the text. Bottom-up strategies rely on actual linguistic knowledge.) Material at this level will include a variety of literary texts, editorials, correspondence, general reports and technical material in professional fields. Rereading is rarely necessary, and misreading is rare.

DISTINGUISHED

Able to read fluently and accurately most styles and forms of the language pertinent to academic and professional needs. Able to relate inferences in the text to real-world knowledge and understand almost all socio-linguistic and cultural references by processing language from within the cultural framework. Able to understand a writer's use of nuance and subtlety. Can readily follow unpredictable turns of thought and author intent in such materials as sophisticated editorials, specialized journal articles, and literary texts such as novels, plays, poems, as well as in any subject matter area directed to the general reader.

ACTFL GENERIC DESCRIPTIONS - WRITING

NOVICE

Novice-Low

Able to form some letters in an alphabetic system. In languages whose writing systems use syllabaries or characters, writer is able to both copy and produce the basic strokes. Can produce romanization of isolated characters, where applicable.

Novice-Mid

Able to copy or transcribe familiar words or phrases and reproduce some from memory. No practical communicative writing skills.

Novice-High

Able to write simple fixed expressions and limited memorized material and some recombinations thereof. Can supply information on simple forms and documents. Can write names, numbers, dates, own nationality, and other simple autobiographical information as well as some short phrases and simple lists. Can write all the symbols in an alphabetic or syllabic system or 50-100 characters or compounds in a character writing system. Spelling and representation of symbols (letters, syllables, characters) may be partially correct.

INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate-Low

Able to meet limited practical writing needs. Can write short messages, postcards, and take down simple notes, such as telephone messages. Can create statements or questions within the scope of limited language experience. Material produced consists of recombinations of learned vocabulary and structures into simple sentences on very familiar topics. Language is inadequate to express in writing anything but elementary needs. Frequent errors in grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling and in formation of non-alphabetic symbols, but writing can be understood by natives used to the writings of non-natives.

Intermediate-Mid

Able to meet a number of practical writing needs. Can write short, simple letters. Content involves personal preferences, daily routine, everyday events, and other topics grounded in personal experience. Can express present time or at least one other time frame or aspect consistently, e.g., nonpast, habitual, imperfective. Evidence of control of the syntax of noncomplex sentences and basic inflectional morphology, such as declensions and conjugation. Writing tends to be a loose collection of sentences or sentence fragments on a given topic and provides little evidence of conscious organization. Can be understood by natives used to the writing of non-natives.

Intermediate-High

Able to meet most practical writing needs and limited social demands. Can take notes in some detail on familiar topics and respond in writing to personal questions. Can write simple letters, brief synopses and paraphrases, summaries of biographical data, work and school experience. In those languages relying primarily on content words and time expressions to express time, tense, or aspect, some precision is displayed; where tense and/or aspect is expressed through verbal inflection, forms are produced rather consistently, but not always accurately. An ability to describe and narrate in paragraphs is emerging. Rarely uses basic cohesive elements, such as pronominal substitutions or synonyms in written discourse. Writing, though faulty, is generally comprehensible to natives used to the writing of non-natives.

ADVANCED

Advanced

Able to write routine social correspondence and join sentences in simple discourse of at least several paragraphs in length on familiar topics. Can write simple social correspondence, take notes, write cohesive summaries and resumes, as well as narratives and descriptions of a factual nature. Has sufficient writing vocabulary to express self simply with some circumlocution. May still make errors in punctuation, spelling, or the formation of non-alphabetic symbols. Good control of the morphology and the most frequently used syntactic structures, e.g., common word order patterns, coordination, subordination, but makes frequent errors in producing complex sentences. Uses a limited number of cohesive devices, such as pronouns, accurately. Writing may resemble literal translations from the native language, but a sense of organization (rhetorical structure) is emerging. Writing is understandable to natives not used to the writing of non-natives.

Advanced High

Able to write about a variety of topics with significant precision and in detail. Can write most social and informal business correspondence. Can describe and narrate personal experiences fully but has difficulty supporting points of view in written discourse. Can write about the concrete aspects of topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Often shows remarkable fluency and ease of expression, but under time constraints and pressure, writing may be inaccurate. Generally strong in either grammar or vocabulary, but not in both. Weakness and unevenness in one of the foregoing or in spelling or character writing formation may result in occasional miscommunication. Some misuse of vocabulary may still be evident. Style may still be obviously foreign.

SUPERIOR

Able to express self effectively in most formal and informal writing on practical, social and professional topics. Can write most types of correspondence, such as memos as well as social and business letters, and short research papers and statements of position in areas of special interest or in special fields. Good control of a full range of structures, spelling or non-alphabetic symbol production, and a wide general vocabulary allow the writer to hypothesize and present arguments or points of view accurately and effectively. An underlying organization, such as chronological ordering, logical ordering, cause and effect, comparison, and thematic development is strongly evident, although not thoroughly executed and/or not totally reflecting target language patterns. Although sensitive to differences in formal and informal style, still may not tailor writing precisely to a variety of purposes and/or readers. Errors in writing rarely disturb natives or cause miscommunication.

DISTINGUISHED

Able to write the language precisely and accurately in a wide variety of prose styles pertinent to professional/educational needs. May have some ability to edit but not in the full range of styles. Has some flexibility within a style and shows some evidence of a use of stylistic devices.