

ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES

Relationship to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

In 1989, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) released the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Based on a scale developed for use by the federal government, the guidelines provide a common metric against which to measure performance in speaking, reading, writing, and listening in a second languages (world languages). The work on proficiency has provided the profession with a common yardstick with which to begin the discussion of performance assessment. These discussions have placed the foreign language profession in an excellent position to develop new kinds of performance-based assessments that reflect the content standards in this document. It is obvious in working with the content standards that they encompass much more than the separate skills format outlined in the proficiency guidelines.

Teachers will recognize the influence of the guidelines within the standards, particularly in the area of communication. However, in keeping with the attempt to create broadly conceived standards, communication is organized around a framework of interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes, rather than carved into separate skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Most importantly, the standards venture into areas that will bring legitimacy to many elements of foreign language instruction that have often been viewed as options or add-ons to make the class “more interesting.” It is this focus on content (i.e., gaining access to information in a range of areas of inquiry and human activity) that may have the most lasting impact on students in the future.