ACTFL

PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES

2024

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Overview of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (the Guidelines) describe an individual's language skills in terms of *proficiency*: the ability to use language to accomplish communication objectives. They portray language proficiency in four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.[1] An individual's level of proficiency in each domain is defined by four criteria, represented by the acronym **FACT**:

- **F**unctions and tasks: The types of communication activities that the individual can handle, such as providing personal information, reading a set of instructions, or interacting with professional colleagues at a conference.
- **A**ccuracy: The degree to which the individual can use linguistic features (including grammar and syntax, vocabulary, discourse structure, sociocultural knowledge, and more) to communicate.
- **C**ontext and content: The situations or circumstances in which the individual can achieve communication goals, and the topic areas that the individual is able to handle.
- **T**ext type: The length and complexity of oral or written text that the individual can understand and produce, ranging from words and phrases to sentences, paragraphs, and multi-paragraph discourse.

Levels and Sublevels

The Guidelines characterize the development of language proficiency as a continuum with five major levels. Each level represents a range of ability (what an individual can do with language) that includes all of the prior levels.

The primary distinction between levels is the functions and tasks (**F**) that an individual at that level can accomplish. With effort and exposure to the language over time, an individual develops the degree of accuracy (**A**) and control of context and content (**C**) and text type (**T**) that are required to accomplish increasingly complex functions and tasks.

The five major levels are as follows:

- **Novice**: The individual can express basic personal information and satisfy a limited number of personal needs using formulaic and rote utterances, lists, and phrases.
- **Intermediate**: The individual can participate in short conversations on predictable topics, ask and answer simple questions, and handle simple transactions using sentence-level communication.
- **Advanced**: The individual can participate in interactions on topics of personal and public interest, narrate and describe in present, past, and future time frames, and handle a situation with a complication using paragraph-level communication.

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[1] Note that the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* use the term "domain" where the Guidelines use "criteria" to refer to functions, contexts/content, text type, and accuracy. In the Guidelines, "domain" always refers to the four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

- **Superior**: The individual can support opinions, hypothesize, discuss topics in abstract terms, and handle a linguistically unfamiliar situation using multi-paragraph discourse.
- **Distinguished**: The individual can negotiate, use persuasive and hypothetical discourse, comment thoughtfully on a range of general topics, and tailor language to a variety of audiences.

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, the Guidelines also include three sublevels:

- **Low**: Baseline performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel have consistent ability to meet the criteria for the level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may demonstrate some hesitation in doing so, but they are able to sustain communication with regard to all of the criteria. They demonstrate little ability to carry out communication functions that typify the next-higher major level.
- **Mid**: Solid performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel demonstrate skill in carrying out the functions of the major level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may also exhibit partial ability to carry out communication tasks that typify the next-higher major level.
- **High**: Performance with quality and quantity at the level. Individuals at this sublevel communicate with ease and confidence when performing the functions of the level. They are capable of functioning much of the time at the next higher major level, but they are unable to sustain language at that level without evidence of difficulty.

The sublevels indicate how well the individual meets the criteria for the major level, and also how close the individual's proficiency is to sustaining the criteria for the next major level. This subdivision thus reflects the fact that over time and with practice an individual's proficiency takes on the characteristics of the next higher level. In structured educational situations, reference to the sublevels helps learners and teachers set realistic expectations, see evidence of progress, and recognize the complex nature of language learning.

Proficiency Assessment

Proficiency assessment involves identifying the functions and tasks that an individual is able to accomplish. An assessment of proficiency determines whether the individual provides evidence of all of the criteria for a particular level, even in unrehearsed communication on unfamiliar topics or within unfamiliar contexts. In order to receive a proficiency rating at a given level, an individual must demonstrate sustained ability to meet each of the FACT criteria for that level in all of the communication situations that pertain to that level, including situations that the individual has not encountered previously.

Proficiency assessment differs significantly from assessment of performance. Performance assessment measures what an individual is able to do within familiar task types, contexts, and content areas, using language that has been learned and rehearsed in an instructional or other structured setting. Performance assessment is useful for indicating growth within formal educational contexts, but it does not provide comprehensive evidence of ability to use language outside of that context (that is, comprehensive evidence of proficiency).

Modes of Communication

For each domain, the Guidelines also reference three modes of communication: Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational. The modes describe the nature of communication in terms of interaction to confirm understanding, clarify meaning, and achieve communication purpose.

- **Interpretive**: One-way communication in which a listener or reader has no way to interact with the speaker/writer/producer. Examples: Listening to a podcast, reading a blog post.
- **Interpersonal**: Two-way or multi-way communication in which participants can interact. Examples: Using text messaging (reading/writing) to agree on a meeting time and location, using video calling (listening/speaking) to interact with a health care professional.
- **Presentational**: One-way communication in which a speaker or writer has no way to check for comprehension on the part of listener(s)/reader(s). Examples: Recording an audio or video message, producing a printed set of instructions.

The inclusion of the modes of communication in the Guidelines is intended to facilitate understanding of the relationships between the Guidelines and the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors*, which are structured in terms of the modes and are used in formal educational contexts.

Comparing Proficiency and Performance

In order to use the Guidelines effectively, educators, learners, and administrators need a clear understanding of how language proficiency resembles and differs from language performance.

The terms *proficiency* and *performance* both refer to what an individual is able to do with language. Both reference purposeful communication that involves practical uses of language. Similar strategies can be used when identifying and teaching toward performance-oriented and proficiency-oriented learning objectives, and progress toward objective achievement is assessed through observation of language use for meaningful communication in both cases.

However, proficiency and performance also differ significantly in ways that have to do with the content, context, nature, and consistency of language use.

Proficiency

Proficiency describes an individual's ability to use the language in all types of situations, with regard to topics that may or may not be familiar and in contexts that may or may not have been encountered previously. Proficiency refers to what an individual is able to do regardless of the setting, or where, when, and how the language was learned.

An assessment of proficiency determines whether the individual provides evidence of all of the criteria for a particular level, even in unrehearsed communication, on unfamiliar topics, or within unfamiliar contexts. The individual must do everything expected at a level consistently in order to be rated or scored at that level.

Performance

Performance

Performance is the ability to use language that reflects practical communication tasks and that has been learned and practiced in an instructional or other structured setting. Performance refers to what an individual is able to do within familiar contexts and content areas, using task-oriented language functions, structures, and vocabulary that have been learned and practiced with guidance from an instructor or instructional materials. The course or program curriculum determines the contexts, content areas, and performance tasks that are taught and assessed.

An assessment of performance determines whether an individual's language use demonstrates the ability to meet the criteria for a particular level when completing a task type within familiar contexts and content areas. Performance assessment asks individuals to apply the language functions and vocabulary that they have learned and practiced during instruction. Table 1 summarizes the differences between performance assessment and proficiency assessment.

Table 1. Assessing Performance vs. Assessing Proficiency

Assessing Performance	Assessing Proficiency
Based on instruction: Describes what the individual can do based on what has been presented in an instructional curriculum or other formal context.	**Independent of specific instruction or curriculum**: Describes what the individual can do regardless of where, when, or how the language was learned.
Rehearsed: Tasks reflect familiar contexts and are derived from the functions, task types, and language that individuals have rehearsed.	**Not Rehearsed:** Tasks may reflect both familiar and unfamiliar topics, contexts, and language.
Familiar content and context: Content is based on what has been learned and rehearsed, within a context that is similar but not identical to the one rehearsed.	**Broad content and context:** Context and content are those that are appropriate for the given level.
Demonstrated performance of rehearsed tasks and contexts: To be rated at a level, the individual must be able to meet the criteria for that level in the contexts, content areas, and tasks that have been presented and rehearsed.	**Sustained performance across all the tasks and contexts for the level:** To be rated at a level, the individual must demonstrate consistent ability to meet all of the criteria for that level, including tasks, content, and contexts that have not been encountered previously.

The rating that an individual receives on a performance assessment can provide evidence of how that individual might be rated on an assessment of proficiency, but it does not specify proficiency level as such. For example, in a performance context, an individual may meet the criteria for the Intermediate level on a communication task that has been learned and practiced. That individual's performance would be rated as Intermediate because the criteria for demonstrated performance in practiced contexts and content areas have been met. In a proficiency context, however, the same individual may not be able to meet the criteria for the Intermediate level consistently in unrehearsed communication tasks. That individual would thus be rated in the Novice range. While the individual shows evidence of meeting some criteria for the Intermediate level, as expected at the Novice Mid and Novice High levels, the criteria for consistency across unrehearsed communication tasks at the Intermediate level have not been met.

Related Resources

Since the initial publication of the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* in 1986, ACTFL and its colleague organizations have developed and refined three related resources for understanding and assessing language skill development. Intended for use by language learners, language educators, and language testers in K-16 educational contexts, these resources incorporate research findings and methodological developments in the language teaching field, including the European Language Portfolio (https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/ home) and Linguafolio (https://ncssfl.org/linguagrow-linguafolio/).

While each of the three resources is aligned with the Guidelines, there is one major difference in structure. The Guidelines are organized on the basis of the four traditional language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The Standards, the Performance Descriptors, and the Can-Do Statements instead use the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes of communication as their organizing principle.

The Standards

The *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015, https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/world-readiness-standards-for-learning-languages) describe what students need to know and be able to do as they learn another language. They define the "what" of language education in terms of five goal areas: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.

The Standards are written for Grades K–16 and include language-specific progress indicators for elementary, secondary, and postsecondary learners. The Guidelines can be used in conjunction with the Standards to describe the ways learners demonstrate ability to make connections and comparisons as they engage in unrehearsed communication as members of local and global communities (that is, in real-world contexts and unrehearsed situations).

The Performance Descriptors

The *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* (ACTFL, 2012, https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/actfl-performance-descriptors) describe a learner's ability to engage in communication tasks that have been presented and rehearsed in Standards-based learning contexts. They reflect "how well" language learners do the "what" from the Standards, whether they are learning in classrooms, online, through independent learning, or in blended environments. Because the Performance Descriptors describe performance outcomes, they can be used to identify learning objectives and to develop activities for use in language instruction.

In addition to their use of the modes of communication as an organizing principle, the Performance Descriptors differ from the Guidelines in two further ways:

- They do not include the distinction among Low, Mid, and High sublevels. In the Guidelines, the sublevels indicate how a learner's proficiency relates to the next higher major level (Low as demonstrating little or no ability at the next major level, Mid as demonstrating some ability, and High as demonstrating extensive ability). This distinction does not apply to the Performance

Descriptors, which describe how well the individual performs the tasks and functions that characterize the major level itself.

- They do not extend to the Superior and Distinguished levels. At these levels, an individual's abilities with regard to tasks and functions, context and content, and text type have broadened and deepened sufficiently that the distinction between prior learning and rehearsal (as in performance) and language use in situations that have not been encountered previously (as in proficiency) is not meaningful.

The Can-Do Statements

The Can-Do Statements (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017, https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements) are aligned with both the Guidelines and the Performance Descriptors, reflecting the continuum of growth in communication skills through the Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished levels. The Can-Do Statements describe what language users can independently do at each sublevel and help pave the way to higher levels.

The Can-Do Statements reference the content of the first two goal areas from the World-Readiness Standards (Communication and Cultures), allowing individuals to identify and set learning goals and chart their progress toward language and intercultural proficiency. By providing clear, concrete benchmarks and examples, the Can-Do Statements also enable educators to create learning objectives for units and lesson plans at different levels. The Can-Do Statements do not identify what to learn or teach at each sublevel; rather, they show the skills and functions that can be carried out with full control at each sublevel. Because they are designed for learner use, they encourage individuals to engage in active goal setting and monitoring of their own progress. Table 2 summarizes the purpose, focus, and intended use/users of each of the related resources.

Table 2. ACTFL Resources for Understanding and Assessing Language Skill Development

Resource	Focus and Purpose	Intended Use/Users
ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (2024)	Describe what individuals can do with language in all types of communication situations and contexts that pertain to a level.	Tools for assessment of an individual's functional language ability in all types of settings and communication contexts. Used by certified testers/raters using a formal protocol. May be used by educators to set expectations for teaching and learning.
World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (2015) https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/world-readiness-standards-for-learning-languages	Describe what individuals know and can do with language. Define the "what" of language education in terms of five goal areas (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities) and 11 standards.	Applicable specifically to learners in formal instructional settings from pre-kindergarten through post-secondary. Used by educators to guide curricular planning and classroom instruction; include progress indicators for each standard.

ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012) https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/actfl-performance-descriptors	Describe what an individual can do with language based on learning and rehearsal in a classroom, online, through independent learning, or in blended environments. Reflect "how well" an individual does the "what" from the Standards.	Can be used by educators and learners to identify learning objectives and develop activities for use in formal language instruction.
NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements (2017) https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements	Describe the Communication and Cultures skills and functions that an individual can perform without aid at each sublevel. Provide clear, concrete benchmarks and examples.	Enable educators to create learning objectives at different levels. Allow individuals to set learning goals and monitor progress in the World-Readiness Standards.

Development of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines were first published in 1986 as an adaptation for the academic community of the U.S. Government's Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Skill Level Descriptions for Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. The Guidelines for Speaking and Writing were revised to reflect practical assessment needs in 1999 and 2001 respectively. In the 2012 (third) edition, the entire set of Guidelines was revised, the major level of Distinguished was added for Speaking and Writing, and the Guidelines were published online, supported with glossed terminology and annotated, multimedia samples of performance at each level for Speaking and Writing, and examples of oral and written texts and tasks associated with each level for Reading and Listening.

The current (fourth) edition expands the Guidelines in ways that clarify their connections with the three related resources described in the Related Resources summary included in the Overview. Changes include the following:

- Specific references to the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes of communication for each domain (listening, speaking, reading, writing)
- Specific references to the seven parameters that serve as structuring elements in the ACTFL Performance Descriptors (functions, context and content, text type, language control, vocabulary, communication strategies, cultural awareness)
- Addition of the element of pronunciation (individual sounds and sound distinctions, word elision, sentence stress and intonation) to the Guidelines for Listening and Speaking
- Addition of the element of writing system to the Guidelines for Reading and Writing

ACTFL Inverted Pyramid

DISTINGUISHED

→ SUPERIOR

→ ADVANCED HIGH

→ ADVANCED MID

→ ADVANCED LOW

→ INTERMEDIATE HIGH

→ INTERMEDIATE MID

→ INTERMEDIATE LOW

→ NOVICE HIGH

→ NOVICE MID

→ NOVICE LOW
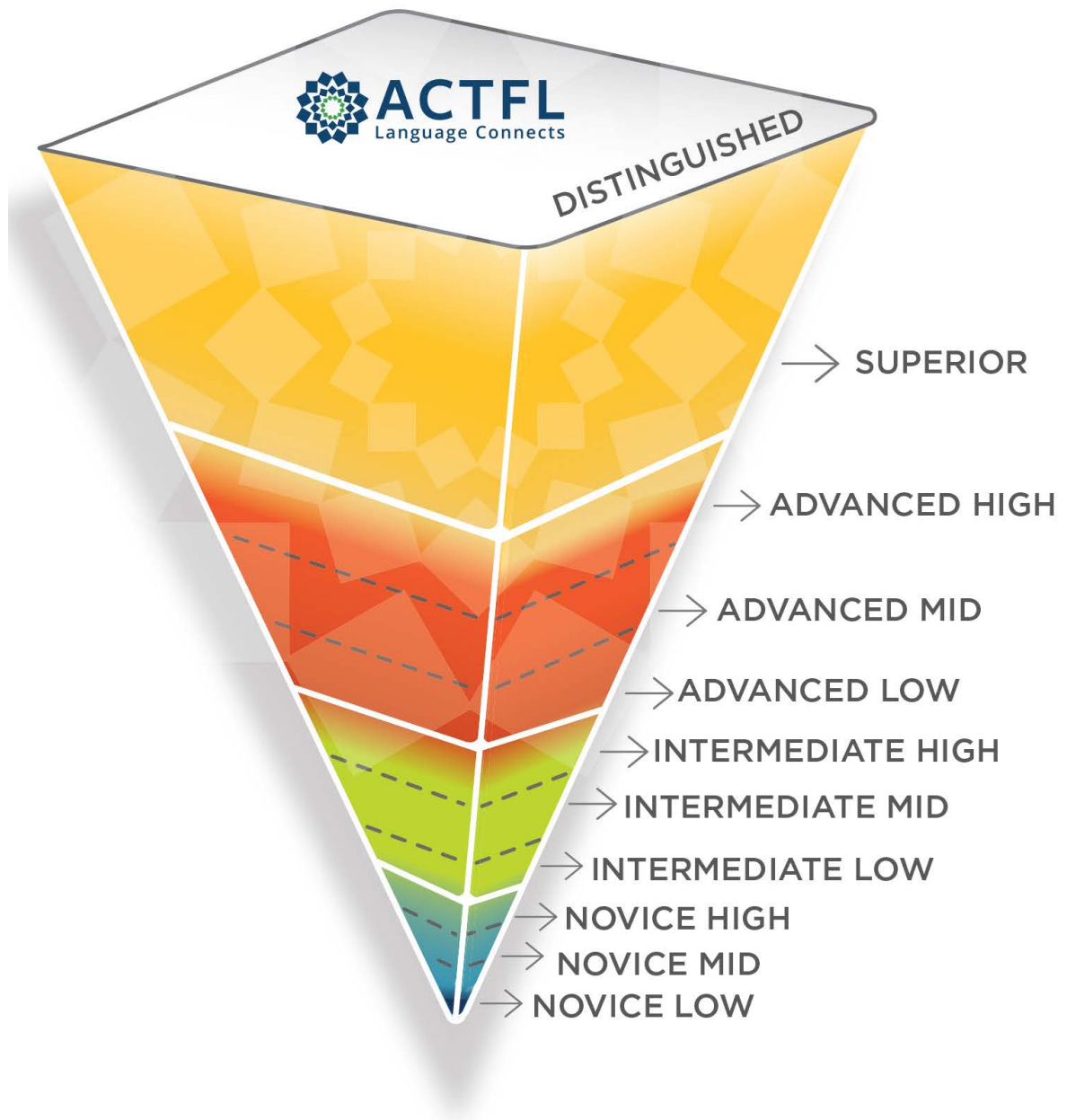
ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES 2024 – SPEAKING

Overview

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking (the Guidelines) describe an individual's ability to use speaking skills and strategies to accomplish communication objectives. Speaking is an actively productive skill. By describing the tasks that language speakers can perform with different types of oral texts and under different types of circumstances, the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking describe how speakers convey a message in oral discourse. The Guidelines do not describe how speaking skills develop, how one learns[1] to speak, or the actual cognitive processes involved in the activity. Rather, they are intended to describe what speakers are able to communicate with spoken language and how they are able to communicate it.

An individual's level of proficiency in speaking is defined by four criteria, represented by the acronym **FACT**:

- **F**unctions and tasks: The types of speaking activities that the individual can carry out, such as responding to basic questions about personal identity, giving a set of directions or instructions, or interacting with professional colleagues in a meeting.
- **A**ccuracy: The degree to which the individual can use linguistic features (including grammar and syntax, vocabulary, stress and intonation, sociocultural knowledge, and more) to convey spoken messages.
- **C**ontext and content: The situations or circumstances in which the individual can achieve speaking goals, and the topic areas that the individual is able to discuss.
- **T**ext type: The length and complexity of text that the individual can produce, ranging from words and phrases to sentences, paragraphs, and multi-paragraph discourse.

The speaking proficiency levels are primarily differentiated by the functions and tasks (**F**) that an individual at each level can carry out consistently. With effort and exposure to the language over time, an individual develops the degree of accuracy (**A**) and control of context and content (**C**) and text type (**T**) that are required to accomplish increasingly complex functions and tasks. In order to receive a rating for speaking at a given proficiency level, an individual must demonstrate sustained ability to meet each of the FACT criteria for that level in all of the communication situations that pertain to that level, including situations that the individual has not encountered previously.

The Major Levels and the Sublevels

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines characterize the development of speaking proficiency as a continuum with five major levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished. Each level represents a range of ability (what an individual can do when speaking) that includes all of the abilities that characterize the prior levels. The descriptors for each level outline what the individual is able to do

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[1] Learning, in this document, refers to the overall process of gaining an additional language, not to learning as used as a construct in a dichotomy of learning or acquiring language.

consistently whenever using the language, regardless of context, topic, or previous experience with the situation.

At each major level, the Guidelines provide a summary description of the criteria for speaking proficiency at that level, including functions and task types (**F**), application of linguistic, sociocultural, and strategic knowledge (**A**), relevant situations and topic areas (**C**), and discourse types (**T**). Each description leads with functions and tasks because these are the main features that distinguish the major levels from one another.

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, short written descriptions of Low, Mid, and High sublevels are also included.

- **Low**: Baseline performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel have consistent ability to meet the criteria for the level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may demonstrate some hesitation in doing so, but they are able to sustain communication with regard to all of the criteria. They demonstrate little ability to carry out communication functions that typify the next-higher major level.
- **Mid**: Solid performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel demonstrate skill in carrying out the functions of the major level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may also exhibit partial ability to carry out communication tasks that typify the next-higher major level.
- **High**: Performance with quality and quantity at the level. Individuals at this sublevel communicate with ease and confidence when performing the functions of the level. They are capable of functioning much of the time at the next higher major level, but they are unable to sustain language at that level without evidence of difficulty.

The sublevels facilitate understanding of the nature of each major level as representing a range of proficiency. They indicate how well the individual meets the criteria for the major level, and also how close the individual's proficiency is to sustaining the criteria for the next major level. The subdivision thus reflects the fact that over time and with practice an individual's proficiency takes on the characteristics of the next higher level. In formal educational situations, reference to the sublevels helps learners and teachers set realistic expectations, see evidence of progress, and recognize the complex nature of language learning.

Correlations with Performance

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, the Guidelines for Speaking also provide tables with the characteristics of performance at the relevant level as outlined in the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners*. The performance descriptor tables use the label *parameters for performance* for the aspects of language use that an individual can demonstrate.[2] For speaking, the performance descriptors are organized in terms of the Interpersonal and Presentational modes of communication, as defined in Table 1.

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[2] The *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* also use the term "domain" for the parameters. This term has been omitted here to avoid potential confusion with its use as an overarching label for listening, speaking, reading, and writing in other contexts. See the Overview of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024 for information on the relationship between the FACT criteria and the parameters for performance.

Table 1. Modes of Communication Relevant to Speaking Proficiency

	Interpersonal	Presentational
Definition	Two-way or multiple-way communication that allows for active negotiation of meaning among individuals.	One-way communication with no direct opportunity for active negotiation of meaning with the message recipient.
Participant role(s)	Create and convey messages; monitor other participant(s) to see how meanings and intentions are being received; request and provide adjustments as needed.	Create and convey messages designed to facilitate interpretation by the message recipient.
Skill areas and examples	Speaking/signing in interactional situations (social conversation; group work in academic or professional contexts; debate).	Speaking/signing (live and in person, live broadcast, recorded video or audio).

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012), page 7.

The inclusion of the performance descriptor tables at the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels is intended to facilitate understanding of the relationship between proficiency and performance for instructors and learners in formal educational settings where the Performance Descriptors are used to set learning goals and measure progress.

- *Proficiency*: Ability to engage in communication tasks in all situations relevant to the level, including those that have not been encountered previously.
- *Performance*: Ability to engage in communication tasks that are relevant to the level and have been presented and rehearsed in instruction or in another structured context.

The *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* parallel the FACT criteria for proficiency as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation of Proficiency Criteria with Parameters of Performance

FACT Criterion (Proficiency)	Parameter (Performance)
Functions	Functions
Context and Content	Contexts and Content
Text Type	Discourse Type
Accuracy (one single criterion)	Comprehension and Comprehensibility (4 sub-parameters) • *Language Control* • *Vocabulary* • *Communication Strategies* • *Cultural Awareness*

The Guidelines for Speaking do not include performance descriptor tables for the Superior and Distinguished levels because the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* do not include descriptors for these levels. At the Superior and Distinguished levels, an individual's abilities with regard to tasks and functions, context and content, and text type have broadened and deepened sufficiently that prior learning and rehearsal (as in performance) as opposed to language use in situations that have not been encountered previously is no longer a meaningful distinction.

The Novice Level

At the Novice level, speakers can communicate short messages on everyday topics that they are familiar with and that affect them directly. They express themselves using words, phrases, simple sentences, and questions that they have encountered, rehearsed, and can recall. They are able to produce greetings, self-introductions, and expressions of courtesy that they have rehearsed, but their understanding of cultural appropriateness is limited. Novice-level speech may be strongly influenced by the pronunciation, stress, intonation, and tone (in tonal languages) patterns of other languages that the individual knows.

Novice Low

Speakers at the Novice Low sublevel are beginning to learn the basics of the language and are able to communicate using common words and phrases that they have rehearsed. Given adequate time and familiar cues, they are able to exchange greetings, give their identity, and name a number of familiar objects from their immediate environment. Their speech may reflect the vocabulary, syntax, and articulation and intonation patterns of other languages in ways that interfere with communication.

Novice Mid

Speakers at the Novice Mid sublevel complete basic social communication tasks using isolated words, rehearsed phrases, and short sentences drawn from the contexts where the individual has learned or been exposed to the language. When responding to direct questions, these speakers may employ stock answers to meet their communicative needs. They pause often as they search for vocabulary or appropriate structure, and they may recycle their own and their communication partner's words as a strategy for maintaining communication. Their speech may incorporate distinct vocabulary, syntax, and articulation and intonation patterns from other languages.

Novice High

Speakers at the Novice High sublevel are able to successfully manage a number of uncomplicated communication tasks in straightforward social situations. Their language consists primarily of short and sometimes incomplete sentences in the present. They can converse on many familiar topics that are necessary for survival, such as basic personal information, basic objects, and a limited number of activities, preferences, and immediate needs. Speakers at the Novice High sublevel can respond to simple, direct questions or requests for information, and they are also able to ask a few formulaic questions. They express personal meaning by using and recombining rehearsed phrases and on occasion by recycling what they hear from their communication partner(s). Much of their language consists of expansions of rehearsed material and stock phrases that can resemble the ability to create with language that characterizes the Intermediate level. Although miscommunication may arise due to the incorporation of features of other languages, speakers at the Novice High sublevel can often use repetition or rephrasing to repair it.

Correlations with Performance

Table 3 outlines the parameters of performance for Novice-level speaking in the Interpersonal and Presentational modes of communication.

Table 3. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Speaking—Novice Level

Overall Description		
Communicates in conversations on very familiar topics using a variety of words, phrases, simple sentences, and questions that have been extensively rehearsed.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Presentational Mode**
Functions	Can ask highly predictable and formulaic questions and respond to such questions by listing, naming, and identifying. May show emerging evidence of the ability to engage in simple conversation on topics related to the self and the immediate environment.	Can present simple, basic information on very familiar topics by producing words, lists, and formulaic phrases or sentences using highly rehearsed language. May show emerging evidence of the ability to create messages related to oneself and immediate environment or express own thoughts and preferences.
Contexts and Content	Can function in some personally relevant contexts on topics that relate to basic biographical information.	Can create messages in some personally relevant contexts on topics that relate to basic biographical information.
Discourse Type	Can produce words, phrases, and extensively rehearsed sentences or formulaic questions.	
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can use rehearsed or formulaic language to engage in simple interactions. Influence of articulation and intonation patterns from other languages may interfere with communication.	Can produce rehearsed or formulaic language that conveys simple messages. Limited language control may require a sympathetic audience to be understood.
Vocabulary	Can produce a number of high-frequency words, highly rehearsed expressions, and formulaic questions.	Can produce a number of high-frequency words and formulaic expressions; able to use a limited variety of vocabulary on familiar topics.
Communication Strategies	Can use some or all of the following strategies to maintain communication: • Imitating modeled words • Using facial expressions and gestures • Repeating words • Using another language • Asking for repetition • Indicating lack of understanding	Can use some or all of the following strategies to communicate: • Relying on a rehearsed format • Using facial expressions and gestures • Repeating words • Using another language • Using graphic organizers to present information • Supporting presentational speaking with visuals and notes
(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can use culturally appropriate gestures and formulaic expressions in highly practiced applications. Can recognize opportunities for own turn (turn-taking conventions) only in highly practiced formulaic communication. May show awareness of the most obvious cultural differences, but may miss cues indicating miscommunication or inappropriateness.	Can use some rehearsed culturally appropriate gestures, formulaic expressions, and basic speaking conventions.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Intermediate Level

Speakers at the Intermediate level are distinguished by their ability to use language creatively, that is, to recombine rehearsed or formulaic material in order to manage transactional and straightforward social situations. They can participate in conversations on familiar topics, ask and answer simple questions, and handle straightforward survival situations. They produce sentence-level language, ranging from discrete sentences to short strings of sentences, typically in present time, and they are able to formulate simple questions. Speakers at the Intermediate level have a growing but limited vocabulary of high-frequency items. Intermediate-level speech may be influenced by the pronunciation, stress, intonation, and tone (in tonal languages) patterns of other languages that individuals know, but they can apply strategies for recognizing and repairing any resulting miscommunication.

Intermediate Low

Speakers at the Intermediate Low sublevel are able to handle successfully a limited number of uncomplicated communication tasks by using the language creatively in straightforward social situations. Their conversation is restricted to concrete exchanges and predictable topics necessary for survival. Topics relate to basic personal information such as self and family, some daily activities and personal preferences, and some immediate needs, such as ordering food and making simple purchases. At the Intermediate Low sublevel, individuals are able to ask a few appropriate questions, but they are primarily reactive and may have difficulty answering direct questions or requests for information.

At the Intermediate Low sublevel, speakers express personal meaning by combining and recombining what they know and what they hear from their communication partner(s) into short sentences. They may hesitate, repeat, or self-correct often as they search for the appropriate linguistic forms and vocabulary to convey the message. Their pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax may be strongly influenced by the other languages that they know, but they can generally be understood.

Intermediate Mid

Speakers at the Intermediate Mid sublevel are able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated communication tasks in straightforward social and transactional situations. They can engage effectively in predictable and concrete exchanges that involve personal information related to self, family, home, daily activities, interests, and personal preferences, as well as physical and social needs, such as food, shopping, travel, and lodging. They are capable of asking a variety of questions to obtain information to meet basic needs, such as instructions, prices, and services.

At the Intermediate Mid sublevel, speakers are able to express personal meaning by creating with the language, in part by combining and recombining known elements and conversational input. Their speech largely consists of strings of sentences; it may contain pauses, reformulations, and self-corrections as they search for adequate vocabulary and appropriate language forms to express themselves, and their pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax may reflect some influence from the other languages that they know. However, they are generally

able to be understood and can sometimes recognize and correct miscommunication when it occurs.

Intermediate High

Speakers at the Intermediate High sublevel are able to converse with ease and confidence when dealing with routine tasks and social situations that require an exchange of basic information related to their work, school, recreation, particular interests, and areas of competence. The breadth of their vocabulary and language control reduces the need for pauses and reformulations when they speak on such topics. The influence of other languages that they know may be evident in their articulation, stress, and intonation patterns, but rarely interferes with successful communication.

At the Intermediate High sublevel, speakers can handle a substantial number of tasks associated with the Advanced level, but they are unable to sustain performance of all of these tasks all of the time. They often can narrate and describe in all major time frames using connected discourse of paragraph length. When they do so, their speech exhibits one or more features of breakdown, such as inability to fully carry out narration or description in the appropriate major time frame, difficulty maintaining paragraph-length discourse, or a reduction in breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary.

Correlations with Performance

Table 4 outlines the parameters of performance for Intermediate-level speaking in Interpersonal and Presentational modes of communication.

Table 4. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Speaking—Intermediate Level

Overall Description		
Expresses self and participates in conversations on familiar topics using sentences and series of sentences. Handles short social interactions in everyday situations by asking and answering a variety of questions. Can communicate about self, others, and everyday life.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Presentational Mode**
Functions	Can use language creatively to manage survival and transactional situations and express personal information and preferences. Consistently able to initiate, maintain, and end a conversation to satisfy basic needs and/or to handle a simple transaction. May show emerging evidence of the ability to communicate beyond the "here and now."	Can express own thoughts and present information and personal preferences on familiar topics by creating with language, primarily in present time. May show emerging evidence of the ability to tell or retell a story and provide additional description.
Contexts and Content	Can communicate in contexts and on topics relevant to the self, others, and the immediate environment.	Can create messages in contexts and on topics relevant to the self, others, and the immediate environment.
Discourse Type	Can understand and produce discrete sentences and sentence strings. Can use some connectors to show sentence relationships.	Can speak in sentences and sentence strings. Can sometimes use sentence connectors to create longer discourse when using rehearsed language.
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can produce straightforward language that contains mostly familiar structures. Can ask and answer a variety of questions. Can control language structures and articulation/stress/intonation patterns sufficiently to ensure clarity in many situations, though some miscommunication may occur.	Can use straightforward language that relies mainly on simple, familiar structures. Can control language structures and articulation/stress/intonation patterns sufficiently to ensure clarity in many situations, though some miscommunication may occur.
Vocabulary	Can produce high-frequency vocabulary on a variety of everyday topics, topics of personal interest, and topics that are familiar or have been rehearsed.	
Communication Strategies	Can ask questions to initiate and sustain conversations. Can use some of the following strategies some of the time to maintain communication: • Asking questions • Asking for clarification • Self-correcting or restating when not understood • Using known language to compensate for unknown vocabulary (circumlocution)	Can use some or all of the following strategies to communicate and maintain audience interest: • Simplifying • Using graphics or images • Using known language to compensate for unknown vocabulary (circumlocution) • Restating or self-correcting when miscommunication occurs • Using reference resources as appropriate
(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can use some culturally appropriate vocabulary, expressions, and gestures when participating in everyday interactions. Recognizes that differences exist in cultural behaviors and perspectives and can conform in familiar situations.	Can use some culturally appropriate vocabulary, expressions, and gestures. Reflects some knowledge of cultural differences related to spoken communication.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Advanced Level

Speakers at the Advanced level engage fully in everyday conversations and routine work-related interactions and communicate on topics of community, national, or international interest. They handle subjects concretely by means of narration and description in the major time frames of past, present, and future. Individuals at this level can typically report facts, make simple recommendations, and provide straightforward descriptions, directions, instructions, and narrations, and they can express points of view in discussion and deal with unpredictable social situations. The breadth and depth of their language control and vocabulary allow them to connect ideas into paragraph-length oral discourse that uses sequencing and linking of phrases for cohesion. The influence of other languages that they know on their stress, intonation, and tone (in tonal languages) may be evident in their speech, but it rarely interferes with communication. Speakers at the Advanced level recognize and refer to major historical or cultural events, and they demonstrate some understanding of cultural and social norms. In addition, they may be able to verbally convey a mood, feeling, or emotion.

Advanced Low

Speakers at the Advanced Low sublevel are able to handle a variety of communication tasks. They are able to participate in most informal and some formal conversations on topics related to school, home, and leisure activities. They can also speak about some topics related to employment, current events, and matters of public and community interest.

At the Advanced Low sublevel, speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future with some control of aspect, although their narrations and descriptions tend to be handled separately rather than interwoven. Speakers at the Advanced Low sublevel combine and link sentences into connected discourse of paragraph length. They can appropriately handle the essential linguistic challenges presented by a complication or an unexpected turn of events.

Speakers at the Advanced Low sublevel communicate with sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion. Their dominant language may be evident in the use of false cognates, literal translations, or the oral paragraph structure of that language, and their discourse may contain hesitations and self-correction. However, they are able to use strategies such as rephrasing and circumlocution to maintain communication and repair misunderstanding.

Advanced Mid

Speakers at the Advanced Mid sublevel are able to handle with ease and confidence a large number of communication 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 topics relating to events of current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance. Speakers at this sublevel contribute to conversations on a variety of familiar topics, using concrete language with much accuracy, clarity, and precision. Their discourse may reflect the oral paragraph structure of another language, but they are able to employ communication strategies such as circumlocution or rephrasing to convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion.

At the Advanced Mid sublevel, speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future by providing a full account, with good control of aspect. Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse. Speakers at this sublevel 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 familiar communication task. Their speech is marked by substantial flow, and their vocabulary is fairly extensive although primarily generic in nature, except in the case of a particular area of specialization or interest.

Advanced High

Speakers at the Advanced High sublevel perform all Advanced-level tasks with linguistic ease, confidence, and competence. They are consistently able to explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames. These speakers may demonstrate a well-developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some language structures or for limitations in vocabulary by the confident use of communication 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.

At the Advanced High sublevel, speakers may demonstrate Superior-level ability when discussing topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests and special fields of expertise. They may also construct hypotheses and provide structured arguments to support their opinions. In general, however, they are more comfortable discussing topics concretely, and they may resort to simplification through the use of description or narration in place of argument or hypothesis.

Correlations with Performance

Table 5 outlines the parameters of performance for Advanced-level speaking in Interpersonal and Presentational modes of communication.

Table 5. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Speaking—Advanced Level

Overall Description		
Expresses self fully to maintain conversations on familiar topics and new concrete social, academic, and work-related topics. Can communicate in paragraph-length conversation about events with detail and organization. Confidently handles situations with an unexpected complication. Shares point of view in discussions.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Presentational Mode**
Functions	Can communicate with ease and confidence by producing narrations and descriptions in all major time frames. Can deal efficiently with a situation with an unexpected turn of events. May show emerging evidence of the ability to participate in discussions about issues beyond the concrete.	Can produce narrations and descriptions in all major time frames on familiar and some unfamiliar topics. May show emerging evidence of the ability to provide a well-supported argument, including detailed evidence in support of a point of view.
Contexts and Content	Can function fully and effectively in contexts both personal and general. Content areas include topics of personal and general interest (community, national, and international events) as well as work-related topics and areas of special competence.	Can create messages fully and effectively in contexts both personal and general. Content areas include topics of personal and general interest (community, national, and international events) as well as work-related topics and areas of special competence.
Discourse Type	Can produce discourse in full oral paragraphs that are organized, cohesive, and detailed. Able to ask questions to probe beyond basic details.	Can produce full paragraphs that are organized, cohesive, and detailed.
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can control basic high-frequency structures consistently with clear, organized communication of ideas. Language control is sufficient to interact efficiently and effectively with a variety of communication partners.	Can control basic high-frequency structures consistently with clear, organized communication of ideas. Language control is sufficient for effective presentation to a variety of audiences.
Vocabulary	Can produce a broad range of vocabulary related to school, employment, topics of personal interest, current events, and matters of public and community interest.	Can produce a broad range of vocabulary related to topics of personal, public, and community interest, and some specific vocabulary related to areas of study or expertise.
Communication Strategies	Can use a range of strategies to maintain communication. Able to • Request clarification • Repeat, restate, and rephrase • Use known language to compensate for unknown vocabulary (circumlocution)	Can use a range of strategies to communicate and maintain audience interest. Able to • Demonstrate conscious efforts at self-editing and correction • Elaborate and clarify • Provide examples, synonyms, or antonyms • Use cohesion, chronology, and details to explain or narrate fully
(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can use cultural knowledge to conform linguistically and behaviorally in many social and work-related interactions. Can show conscious awareness of significant cultural differences and try to adjust accordingly.	Can use cultural knowledge appropriate to the presentational context and reflective of established cultural practices and perspectives.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Superior Level

At the Superior level, speakers communicate with accuracy and fluency as they participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of concrete and abstract topics in formal and informal settings. They can discuss their interests and fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency, and accuracy. They can state and defend their opinions on issues of interest to them, develop hypotheses, resolve unexpected situations, and discuss the implications of societal issues.

Speakers at the Superior level use extended discourse without lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract discussion. They produce cohesive discourse with clear relationships of ideas and may employ some rhetorical devices, such as simile or metaphor. They use a variety of interactive and discourse strategies, such as turn-taking and separating main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic, lexical, and phonetic devices.

Speakers at the Superior level demonstrate no patterns of error in the use of basic structures, although they may make sporadic errors in low-frequency structures and in complex high-frequency structures. Such errors, if they do occur, do not distract from or interfere with communication.

The Distinguished Level

Speakers at the Distinguished level are able to use language skillfully and with accuracy, efficiency, and effectiveness. They are articulate users of the language who can discuss a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts in culturally appropriate ways. At the Distinguished level, individuals can advise, persuade, and negotiate, and they can use persuasive and hypothetical discourse to advocate a point of view that is not necessarily their own. They can tailor language to a variety of audiences by adapting their speech and register in ways that are culturally authentic, and they can participate in or give a formal speech at a conference or debate.

Speakers at the Distinguished level produce highly sophisticated and tightly organized extended discourse. They can speak succinctly, often using cultural and historical references to express meaning without extended description or explanation. At this level, oral discourse typically resembles written discourse. Speakers at the Distinguished level use discourse strategies such as rhetorical devices to organize and present their thoughts. They speak effortlessly and smoothly; while the influence of articulation or intonation patterns from other known languages may be present, it does not interfere with communication.

ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES 2024 – WRITING

Overview

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Writing (the Guidelines) describe an individual's ability to use writing skills and strategies to accomplish communication objectives. Writing is an actively productive skill. By describing the tasks that writers can handle and the types of written text they can produce, the Guidelines for Writing describe how an individual conveys messages in writing at each level. The Guidelines do not describe how writing skills develop, how one learns[1] to write, or the actual cognitive processes involved in the activity. Rather, they are intended to describe what individuals are able to communicate with written language and how they are able to communicate it.

An individual's level of proficiency in writing is defined by four criteria, represented by the acronym **FACT**:

- **F**unctions and tasks: The types of writing activities that the individual can carry out, such as completing an information form, providing a set of written instructions, or interacting with professional colleagues in an online discussion forum.
- **A**ccuracy: The degree to which the individual can use linguistic features (including grammar and syntax, vocabulary, cohesive devices, sociocultural knowledge, and more) to convey written messages.
- **C**ontext and content: The situations or circumstances in which the individual can achieve writing goals, and the topic areas that the individual is able to address in writing.
- **T**ext type: The length and complexity of written text that the individual can produce, ranging from words and phrases to sentences, paragraphs, and multi-paragraph discourse.

The writing proficiency levels are primarily differentiated by the functions and tasks (**F**) that an individual at each level can carry out consistently. With effort and exposure to the language over time, an individual develops the degree of accuracy (**A**) and control of context and content (**C**) and text type (**T**) that are required to accomplish increasingly complex functions and tasks. In order to receive a rating for writing at a given proficiency level, an individual must demonstrate sustained ability to meet each of the FACT criteria for that level in all of the communication situations that pertain to that level, including situations that the individual has not encountered previously.

The Major Levels and the Sublevels

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines characterize the development of writing proficiency as a continuum with five major levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished. Each level represents a range of ability (what an individual can do when writing) that includes all of the abilities that characterize the prior levels. The descriptors for each level outline what the individual is able to do consistently whenever using the language, regardless of context, topic, or previous experience with the situation.

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[1] Learning, in this document, refers to the overall process of gaining an additional language, not to learning as used as a construct in a dichotomy of learning or acquiring language.

At each major level, the Guidelines provide a summary description of the criteria for writing proficiency at that level, including functions and task types (**F**), application of linguistic, sociocultural, and strategic knowledge (**A**), relevant situations and topic areas (**C**), and discourse types (**T**). Each description leads with functions and tasks because functions are the main feature that distinguishes the major levels from one another.

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, short written descriptions of Low, Mid, and High sublevels are also included.

- **Low**: Baseline performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel have consistent ability to meet the criteria for the level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may demonstrate some hesitation in doing so, but they are able to sustain communication with regard to all of the criteria. They demonstrate little ability to carry out communication functions that typify the next-higher major level.
- **Mid**: Solid performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel demonstrate skill in carrying out the functions of the major level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may also exhibit partial ability to carry out communication tasks that typify the next-higher major level.
- **High**: Performance with quality and quantity at the level. Individuals at this sublevel communicate with ease and confidence when performing the functions of the level. They are capable of functioning much of the time at the next higher major level, but they are unable to sustain language at that level without evidence of difficulty.

The sublevels facilitate understanding of the nature of each major level as representing a range of proficiency. They indicate how well the individual meets the criteria for the major level, and also how close the individual's proficiency is to sustaining the criteria for the next major level. The subdivision thus reflects the fact that over time and with practice an individual's proficiency takes on the characteristics of the next higher level. In formal educational situations, reference to the sublevels helps learners and teachers set realistic expectations, see evidence of progress, and recognize the complex nature of language learning.

Correlations with Performance

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, the ACTFL Guidelines for Writing also provide tables with the characteristics of performance at the relevant level as outlined in the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners*. The performance descriptor tables use the label *parameters for performance* for the aspects of language use that an individual can demonstrate.[2] For writing, the performance descriptors are organized in terms of the Interpersonal and Presentational modes of communication, as defined in Table 1.

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[2] The *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* also use the term "domain" for the parameters. This term has been omitted here to avoid potential confusion with its use as an overarching label for Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing in other contexts. See the Overview of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024 for information on the relationship between the FACT criteria and the parameters for performance.

Table 1. Modes of Communication Relevant to Writing Proficiency

	Interpersonal	Presentational
Definition	Two-way or multiple-way communication that allows for active negotiation of meaning among individuals.	One-way communication with no direct opportunity for active negotiation of meaning with the message recipient.
Participant role(s)	Create and convey messages; monitor other participant(s) to see how meanings and intentions are being received; request and provide clarifications as needed.	Create and convey messages designed to facilitate interpretation by the message recipient.
Skill areas and examples	Writing in interactional situations (text message exchanges; group writing projects in an academic or professional context).	Production of written text with or without visual support for the reader (completing an information form; writing a narrative or description with/without visual aids; writing a comparison/contrast summary).

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012), page 7.

The inclusion of the performance descriptor tables at the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels is intended to facilitate understanding of the relationship between proficiency and performance for instructors and learners in formal educational settings where the Performance Descriptors are used to set learning goals and measure progress.

- *Proficiency*: Ability to engage in communication tasks in all situations relevant to the level, including those that have not been encountered previously.
- *Performance*: Ability to engage in communication tasks that are relevant to the level and have been presented and rehearsed in instruction or in another structured context.

The *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* parallel the FACT criteria for proficiency as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation of Proficiency Criteria with Parameters of Performance

FACT Criterion (Proficiency)	Parameter (Performance)
Functions	Functions
Context and Content	Contexts and Content
Text Type	Discourse Type
Accuracy (one single criterion)	Comprehension and Comprehensibility (4 sub-parameters) • *Language Control* • *Vocabulary* • *Communication Strategies* • *Cultural Awareness*

The Guidelines for Writing do not include performance descriptor tables for the Superior and Distinguished levels because the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* do not include descriptors for these levels. At the Superior and Distinguished levels, an individual's abilities with regard to tasks and functions, context and content, and text type have broadened and deepened sufficiently that prior learning and rehearsal (as in performance) as opposed to language use in situations that have not been encountered previously is no longer a meaningful distinction.

The Novice Level

At the Novice level, writers can reproduce practiced material to convey simple messages on everyday topics that they are familiar with and that affect them directly. They express themselves using words, phrases, and simple sentences, and can produce lists, notes, and limited formulaic information on simple forms and documents. In addition, they can transcribe familiar words or phrases, copy letters of the alphabet or syllables of a syllabary, or reproduce basic characters with some accuracy.

Novice Low

Writers at the Novice Low sublevel are able to copy or transcribe familiar words or phrases, form letters in an alphabetic system, and copy and produce isolated, basic strokes in languages that use syllabaries or characters. Given adequate time and familiar cues, they can reproduce from memory a very limited number of isolated words or familiar phrases. Their writing may reflect the vocabulary and syntactic patterns of other languages in ways that interfere with communication.

Novice Mid

Writers at the Novice Mid sublevel can reproduce from memory a modest number of words and phrases in context. They can supply basic biographical information, such as names, numbers, and nationality, and other limited information on simple forms and documents. Writers at the Novice Mid sublevel exhibit a high degree of accuracy when writing on well-rehearsed, familiar topics using limited formulaic language. With less familiar topics, there is a marked decrease in accuracy. Errors in spelling or in the representation of symbols may be frequent.

Novice High

Writers at the Novice High sublevel are able to meet basic practical writing needs using lists, short messages, and simple notes. They are able to express a simple message within the context in which the language was learned, relying mainly on practiced material. Their writing is focused on common elements of daily life. At the Novice High sublevel, writers are able to demonstrate an Intermediate-level ability to recombine vocabulary and structures that they have rehearsed to create simple sentences on very familiar topics, but they are not able to sustain sentence-level writing all the time. Due to limited exposure to and rehearsal of the language, writing at this sublevel may only partially communicate the intentions of the writer.

Correlations with Performance

Table 3 outlines the parameters of performance for Novice-level writing in Interpersonal and Presentational modes of communication.

Table 3. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Writing—Novice Level

Overall Description		
Communicates written information on very familiar topics using a variety of words, phrases, simple sentences, and questions that have been extensively rehearsed.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Presentational Mode**
Functions	Can respond to highly predictable and formulaic questions by listing, naming, and identifying or labeling. May show emerging evidence of the ability to engage in simple written exchanges such as notes or text messages.	Can provide basic personal information on very familiar topics using highly practiced words, lists, notes, and formulaic language. May show emerging evidence of ability to express own thoughts and preferences.
Contexts and Content	Can reproduce simple practiced messages in personally relevant contexts on topics that relate to basic biographical information. May show emerging evidence of ability to create messages in highly practiced contexts related to self and immediate environment.	
Discourse Type	Can produce lists, notes, and formulaic information using words, phrases, and highly practiced sentences. Can write formulaic or highly rehearsed questions.	
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can produce rehearsed words and phrases that are appropriate to the context. Limited control of spelling and/or writing system may interfere with ability to convey intended meaning.	
Vocabulary	Can produce a number of high-frequency words, highly practiced expressions, and formulaic questions and phrases.	Can produce a number of high-frequency words and formulaic expressions; can use a variety of vocabulary on familiar topics.
Communication Strategies	Can use some or all of the following strategies to maintain communication: • Relying on a rehearsed or formulaic format • Imitating modeled written words • Using another language • Indicating lack of understanding (writing a question mark) • Using graphic organizers and visuals to support written material	Can use some or all of the following strategies to communicate: • Relying on a formulaic or rehearsed format with multiple drafts • Using modeled words • Using graphic organizers and visuals to support written material • Using another language
(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can use culturally appropriate formulaic expressions in highly practiced applications. May show awareness of the most obvious cultural conventions.	Can use basic writing conventions and some rehearsed culturally appropriate formulaic expressions.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Intermediate Level

Writers at the Intermediate level have the ability to meet practical writing needs, such as simple messages and letters, requests for information, and notes. In addition, they can ask and respond to simple questions in writing. These writers can create with the language and communicate simple facts and ideas in a series of loosely connected sentences on topics of personal interest and social needs. They write primarily in present time. At this level, writers use basic vocabulary and structures to express meaning.

Intermediate Low

Writers at the Intermediate Low sublevel are able to meet some limited practical writing needs. They can create statements and formulate questions based on familiar material. Most writing consists of short, simple sentences that recombine learned vocabulary and structures using basic word order, present tense, and conversational style. Topics are tied to highly predictable content areas and personal information. Vocabulary is adequate to express elementary needs. There may be basic errors in grammar, word choice, punctuation, spelling, and the formation and use of non-alphabetic symbols.

Intermediate Mid

Writers at the Intermediate Mid sublevel are able to meet a number of practical writing needs. They can write short, simple communications, compositions, and requests for information in loosely connected texts about personal preferences, daily routines, common events, and other personal topics. Their writing demonstrates control of basic sentence structures and verb forms. It is usually framed in present time but may contain references to other time frames. The writing style at this sublevel resembles oral discourse; it consists of discrete sentences that are loosely strung together with little evidence of deliberate organization.

Intermediate High

Writers at the Intermediate High sublevel are able to meet all practical writing needs of the Intermediate level, including routine transactional tasks and social situations that require an exchange of basic information related to work, school, recreation, individual interests, and areas of competence. The breadth of their vocabulary and language control is sufficient to ensure successful communication. Additionally, these writers can demonstrate an Advanced-level ability to write paragraph-length compositions and simple summaries related to work and/or school experiences but cannot do this all of the time. They can narrate and describe in different time frames when writing about everyday events and situations, but their writing exhibits some challenges in structure or vocabulary use when they do so.

Correlations with Performance

Table 4 outlines the parameters of performance for Intermediate-level writing in Interpersonal and Presentational modes of communication.

Table 4. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Writing—Intermediate Level

Overall Description		
Communicates information and expresses own thoughts about familiar topics using sentences and series of sentences. Handles brief written social interactions in everyday situations by asking and answering a variety of questions. Can communicate about self, others, and everyday life.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Presentational Mode**
Functions	Can manage transactional and survival situations and express personal information and preferences in writing. Consistently able to initiate, maintain, and end written interactions to satisfy basic needs and handle simple transactions. May show emerging evidence of ability to communicate on general interest and school- or work-related topics.	Can express own thoughts and provide information and personal preferences on familiar topics by creating with language, primarily in present time. May show emerging evidence of ability to tell or retell a story and provide additional description.
Contexts and Content	Can create written messages in contexts and on topics relevant to self, others, and the immediate environment.	
Discourse Type	Can produce discrete sentences and sentence strings. Can use some connectors to show sentence relationships.	Can write in sentences and sentence strings. Can demonstrate some ability to use sentence connectors to create longer discourse when using rehearsed language.
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can produce straightforward language that relies mainly on simple, familiar structures. Can ask and answer a variety of questions. Control of language structures, spelling, and writing system is sufficient to ensure clarity in most situations.	Can use straightforward language that relies mainly on simple, familiar structures. Control of language structures, spelling, and writing system is sufficient to ensure clarity in most situations.
Vocabulary	Can produce high-frequency vocabulary on a variety of everyday topics, topics of personal interest, and topics that are familiar or have been studied.	
Communication Strategies	Can ask questions to initiate and sustain two-way written exchanges. Can use some of the following strategies some of the time to maintain communication: • Asking questions • Asking for clarification • Self-correcting or restating when not understood • Using known language to compensate for unknown vocabulary (circumlocution)	Can use some or all of the following strategies to communicate and maintain audience interest: • Simplifying • Using graphics or images • Using known language to compensate for unknown vocabulary (circumlocution) • Self-correcting or restating • Using reference resources
(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can use some socioculturally appropriate vocabulary and expressions when participating in everyday interactions. Recognizes that differences exist in cultural behaviors and perspectives and can conform in familiar situations.	Can use some socioculturally appropriate vocabulary and expressions. Can demonstrate some knowledge of cultural differences related to written communication.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012)

The Advanced Level

Writers at the Advanced level are characterized by the ability to write routine informal and some formal correspondence, as well as narratives, descriptions, and factual summaries. They can narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future, using paraphrasing and elaboration to provide clarity. Writers at this level produce connected discourse of paragraph length and structure. At this level, writers show good control of the most frequently used structures and generic vocabulary.

Advanced Low

Writers at the Advanced Low sublevel are able to meet basic work and/or academic writing needs. They are able to narrate and describe in major time frames with some control of aspect, and to compose simple summaries on familiar topics. At the Advanced Low sublevel, writers are able to combine and link sentences into texts of paragraph length and structure. They demonstrate the ability to use a limited number of cohesive devices, and may resort to some redundancy and repetition. They rely on patterns of oral discourse and the writing style(s) of other languages that they know.

Advanced Mid

Writers at the Advanced Mid sublevel are able to meet a range of work and/or academic writing needs. They are able to narrate and describe with detail in all major time frames with good control of aspect, and to write straightforward summaries on topics of general interest. Their writing uses a variety of cohesive devices in texts up to several paragraphs in length, and exhibits good control of frequently used syntactic structures and a range of general vocabulary. Thoughts are usually expressed clearly and supported by some elaboration. Writers at the Advanced Mid sublevel may combine organizational features from different languages, and their writing may at times resemble oral discourse.

Advanced High

Writers at the Advanced High sublevel are able to write about a variety of topics with precision, detail, and ease of expression. They can handle informal and formal correspondence according to appropriate conventions and can write factual summaries and reports. They can also write extensively about topics relating to particular interests and special areas of competence, although their writing tends to emphasize the concrete aspects of such topics. At the Advanced High sublevel, writers can narrate and describe in the major time frames with solid control of aspect. They have good control of a range of grammatical structures and a fairly wide range of general vocabulary. In addition, they are able to handle writing tasks associated with the Superior level, such as developing arguments and constructing hypotheses, but are not able to do this all of the time.

Correlations with Performance

Table 5 outlines the parameters of performance for Advanced-level writing in Interpersonal and Presentational modes of communication.

Table 5. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Writing—Advanced Level

Overall Description		
Communicates information, expresses self, and shares point of view with detail and organization on familiar and some new concrete topics. Can create cohesive paragraph-length written material.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Presentational Mode**
Functions	Can communicate with ease and confidence by producing narrations and descriptions in all major time frames. Can deal efficiently with a situation with an unexpected turn of events. May show emerging evidence of ability to participate in written interactions about issues beyond the concrete.	Can produce narrations and descriptions in all major time frames on familiar and some unfamiliar topics. May show emerging evidence of the ability to provide a well-supported argument, including detailed evidence in support of a point of view.
Contexts and Content	Can function fully and effectively in personal and general contexts. Content areas include topics of personal and general interest (community, national, and international events) as well as work-related topics and areas of special competence.	Can create messages fully and effectively in personal and general contexts. Content areas include topics of personal and general interest (community, national, and international events) as well as work-related topics and areas of special competence.
Discourse Type	Can produce full paragraphs that are organized, cohesive, and detailed.	
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can control basic high-frequency structures consistently to facilitate written production. Can interact efficiently and effectively in writing with a variety of communication partners.	Can control high-frequency structures consistently to facilitate clear, organized communication of ideas. Can present material effectively in writing to a variety of audiences.
Vocabulary	Produces a broad range of vocabulary related to topics of personal, public, and community interest, and some specific vocabulary related to areas of study or expertise.	
Communication Strategies	Can use a range of strategies to maintain communication, including the following: • Requesting clarification in writing • Rephrasing written material • Using known language to compensate for unknown vocabulary (circumlocution) • Demonstrating conscious efforts at self-editing and correction	Can use a range of strategies to communicate and maintain audience interest, including the following: • Demonstrating conscious efforts at self-editing and correction • Elaborating and clarifying • Providing examples, synonyms, or antonyms • Using cohesion, chronology, and details to explain or narrate fully
(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can use sociocultural knowledge to conform linguistically and behaviorally in many social and work-related interactions. Demonstrates conscious awareness of significant cultural differences and attempts to adjust accordingly.	Can apply sociocultural knowledge appropriate to the presentational context and reflective of established cultural practices and perspectives.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Superior Level

Writers at the Superior level are able to produce most kinds of formal and informal correspondence, as well as summaries, reports, and other extended texts on a variety of social, academic, and professional topics. Their treatment of issues moves beyond the concrete to the abstract. At the Superior level, writers can explain complex matters and can present and support opinions by developing cogent arguments and hypotheses. They organize and prioritize ideas to convey to the reader what is significant, and their writing is enhanced by the effective use of structure, lexicon, and writing protocols. The relationships among ideas are consistently clear, due to the use of organizational and developmental principles such as cause and effect, comparison, and chronology.

Writers at the Superior level demonstrate a high degree of control of grammar and syntax, of both general and specialized/professional vocabulary, of spelling or symbol production, of cohesive devices, and of punctuation. Their vocabulary is precise and varied. Writers at this level direct their writing to their audiences; their writing fluency eases the reader's task.

The Distinguished Level

Writers at the Distinguished level can carry out formal writing tasks such as official correspondence, position papers, and journal articles. They can write analytically on professional, academic and societal issues. In addition, at the Distinguished level, writers are able to address world issues in a highly conceptualized fashion. These writers can use persuasive and hypothetical discourse to advocate a position that is not necessarily their own. They are also able to communicate subtlety and nuance. Distinguished-level writing is sophisticated and is directed to sophisticated readers. Writers at this level write to their audience; they tailor their language to their readers.

Writers at the Distinguished level demonstrate control of complex lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic features of the language. Discourse structure and punctuation are used strategically, not only to organize meaning but also to enhance it, and conventions are generally appropriate to the text modality and the culture. Distinguished-level writing is dense and complex, but is characterized by an economy of expression. The writing is skillfully crafted and is organized in a way that reflects the cultural thought patterns of the readers. At the Distinguished level, length is not a determining factor. Writers at this level tailor their writing, including its format and length, to match the writing purpose.

ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES 2024 – LISTENING

Overview

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Listening (the Guidelines) describe an individual's ability to use listening skills and strategies to accomplish communication objectives. Listening is an actively interpretive skill in which individuals comprehend on the basis of the amount and type of information they can retrieve from what they hear and the inferences and connections that they can make. The Guidelines recognize the active nature of listening by describing the tasks that listeners can accomplish with different types of aural texts and under different circumstances. They do not describe how listening skills develop, how one learn[1] to listen, or the actual cognitive processes involved. Rather, they describe what listeners understand from what they hear and how their listening skills enable them to understand it.

An individual's level of proficiency in listening is defined by four criteria, represented by the acronym **FACT**:

- **F**unctions and tasks: The types of listening activities that the individual can carry out, such as recognizing spoken words and phrases, following oral instructions, or interacting with professional colleagues in a meeting.
- **A**ccuracy: The degree to which the individual can use linguistic features (including grammar and syntax, vocabulary, stress and intonation, discourse structure, sociocultural knowledge, and more) to process aural messages.
- **C**ontext and content: The situations or circumstances in which the individual can achieve listening goals, and the topic areas that the individual is able to handle.
- **T**ext type: The length and complexity of aural text that the individual can understand and process, ranging from words and phrases to sentences, paragraphs, and multi-paragraph discourse.

The listening proficiency levels are primarily differentiated by the functions and tasks (**F**) that an individual at each level can carry out consistently. With effort and exposure to the language over time, an individual develops the degree of accuracy (**A**) and control of context and content (**C**) and text type (**T**) that are required to accomplish increasingly complex functions and tasks. In order to receive a rating for listening at a given proficiency level, an individual must demonstrate sustained ability to meet each of the FACT criteria for that level in all of the communication situations that pertain to that level, including situations that the individual has not encountered previously.

The Major Levels and the Sublevels

The Guidelines for Listening characterize the development of listening proficiency as a continuum with five major levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished. Each level represents a range of ability (what an individual can do when listening) that includes all of the abilities that

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[1] Learning, in this document, refers to the overall process of gaining an additional language, not to learning as used as a construct in a dichotomy of learning or acquiring language.

characterize the prior levels. The descriptors for each level outline what the individual is able to do consistently whenever using the language, regardless of context, topic, or previous experience with the situation.

At each major level, the Guidelines provide a summary description of the criteria for listening proficiency at that level, including functions and task types (**F**), application of linguistic, sociocultural, and strategic knowledge (**A**), relevant situations and topic areas (**C**), and discourse types (**T**). Each description leads with functions and tasks because functions are the main feature that distinguishes the major levels from one another.

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, short written descriptions of Low, Mid, and High sublevels are also included.

- **Low**: Baseline performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel have consistent ability to meet the criteria for the level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may demonstrate some hesitation in doing so, but they are able to sustain communication with regard to all of the criteria. They demonstrate little ability to carry out communication functions that typify the next-higher major level.
- **Mid**: Solid performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel demonstrate skill in carrying out the functions of the major level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may also exhibit partial ability to carry out communication tasks that typify the next-higher major level.
- **High**: Performance with quality and quantity at the level. Individuals at this sublevel communicate with ease and confidence when performing the functions of the level. They are capable of functioning much of the time at the next higher major level, but they are unable to sustain language at that level without evidence of difficulty.

The sublevels facilitate understanding of the nature of each major level as representing a range of proficiency. They indicate how well the individual meets the criteria for the major level, and also how close the individual's proficiency is to sustaining the criteria for the next major level. The subdivision thus reflects the fact that over time and with practice an individual's proficiency takes on the characteristics of the next higher level. In formal educational situations, reference to the sublevels helps learners and teachers set realistic expectations, see evidence of progress, and recognize the complex nature of language learning.

Correlations with Performance

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, the Guidelines for Listening also provide tables with the characteristics of performance at the relevant level as outlined in the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners*. The performance descriptor tables use the label *parameters for performance*[2] for the aspects of language use that an individual can demonstrate. For listening, the performance descriptors are organized in terms of the Interpersonal and Interpretive modes of communication, as defined in Table 1.

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[2] The *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* also use the term "domain" for the parameters. This term has been omitted here to avoid potential confusion with its use as an overarching label for listening, speaking, reading, and writing in other contexts. See the Overview of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024 for information on the relationship between the FACT criteria and the parameters for performance.

Table 1. Modes of Communication Relevant to Listening Proficiency

	Interpersonal	Interpretive
Definition	Two-way or multiple-way communication that allows for active negotiation of meaning among individuals.	One-way communication with no direct opportunity for active negotiation of meaning with the speaker, signer, or producer.
Participant role(s)	Monitor other participant(s) to see how meanings and intentions are being communicated and identify appropriate responses and needs for clarification.	Interpret what the speaker, signer, or producer wants the receiver of the message to understand.
Skill areas and examples	Listening or observing signing in interactional situations (social conversation; group work in academic or professional contexts; debate).	Listening (live and in person, live broadcast, recorded); viewing (signing, videos, films).

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012), page 7.

The inclusion of the performance descriptor tables at the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels is intended to facilitate understanding of the relationship between proficiency and performance for instructors and learners in formal educational settings where the Performance Descriptors are used to set learning goals and measure progress.

- *Proficiency*: Ability to engage in communication tasks in all situations relevant to the level, including those that have not been encountered previously.
- *Performance*: Ability to engage in communication tasks that are relevant to the level and have been presented and rehearsed in instruction or in another structured context.

The *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* parallel the FACT criteria for proficiency as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation of Proficiency Criteria with Parameters of Performance

FACT Criterion (Proficiency)	Parameter (Performance)
Functions	Functions
Context and Content	Contexts and Content
Text Type	Discourse Type
Accuracy (one single criterion)	Comprehension and Comprehensibility (4 sub-parameters) • *Language Control* • *Vocabulary* • *Communication Strategies* • *Cultural Awareness*

The Guidelines for Listening do not include performance descriptor tables for the Superior and Distinguished levels because the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* do not include descriptors for these levels. At the Superior and Distinguished levels, an individual's abilities with regard to tasks and functions, context and content, and text type have broadened and deepened sufficiently that prior learning and rehearsal (as in performance) as opposed to language use in situations that have not been encountered previously is no longer a meaningful distinction.

The Novice Level

At the Novice level, individuals can recognize key words, true aural cognates, and formulaic expressions that are highly contextualized and highly predictable, such as those found in introductions and greetings. They can understand words and phrases from simple questions, statements, and high-frequency commands that they have learned and rehearsed. They typically require repetition, rephrasing, and/or a slowed rate of speech for comprehension, and they have difficulty distinguishing sounds and tones (in tonal languages) that are not already familiar to them from another language.

These individuals are most accurate when they are able to anticipate what they will hear; that is, they tend to recognize rather than truly comprehend. They rely heavily on factors other than the message itself, such as gestures, visual supports, and familiarity with the situation or context, as well as the speaker's use of redundancy, restatement, and paraphrasing, to facilitate listening comprehension.

Novice Low

At the Novice Low sublevel, individuals are able occasionally to recognize isolated words or very high-frequency phrases when those are strongly supported by context, gestures and visuals, and other aids. These individuals demonstrate almost no comprehension of any kind of spoken message, not even within the most basic personal and social context.

Novice Mid

At the Novice Mid sublevel, individuals can recognize and begin to understand a number of high-frequency, highly contextualized words and phrases, including aural cognates, borrowed words, and loanwords. Typically, they understand little more than one phrase at a time, and they may need repetition.

Novice High

At the Novice High sublevel, individuals can understand highly standardized messages, phrases, or brief instructions on areas of practical need if the vocabulary has been learned and rehearsed. They are often, but not always, able to demonstrate Intermediate-level listening skills. For example, listeners at this level can understand sentence-length speech, one utterance at a time, in basic personal and social contexts where there is contextual or extralinguistic support, though their comprehension may be uneven.

Correlations with Performance

Table 3 outlines the parameters of performance for Novice-level listening in Interpersonal and Interpretive modes of communication.

Table 3. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Listening—Novice Level

Overall Description		
Understands words, phrases, and formulaic language that have been learned and rehearsed. Can derive meaning of the main idea from simple, highly-predictable oral messages, with strong visual or other contextual support.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Interpretive Mode**
Functions	Can recognize highly predictable language and formulaic questions that have been learned and rehearsed. May show emerging evidence of ability to comprehend in simple conversations.	Can derive meaning by recognizing key words and formulaic phrases that are highly contextualized and have been rehearsed. May show emerging evidence of ability to understand simple messages based on background and prior knowledge.
Contexts and Content	Can comprehend in some personally relevant contexts on topics that relate to basic biographical information.	Can comprehend topics within highly predictable, familiar contexts (those related to personal background, prior knowledge, or personal experiences).
Discourse Type	Can understand words, phrases, formulaic expressions, and an occasional simple sentence that has been learned and rehearsed.	
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can usually comprehend highly practiced basic messages when supported by visual or contextual clues, redundancy, or restatement, and when the message contains familiar structures.	Primarily relies on vocabulary to derive meaning from aural messages. Has great difficulty distinguishing sounds and tones (in tonal languages) that differ from those of other known languages. May derive meaning by recognizing structural patterns that have been practiced in familiar contexts.
Vocabulary	Can understand a number of high frequency words, highly practiced expressions, and formulaic questions.	Can comprehend highly predictable vocabulary, a limited number of words related to familiar topics, and formulaic expressions.
Communication Strategies	Can use some or all of the following strategies to maintain communication: • Imitating modeled words • Using facial expressions and gestures • Repeating words • Using another language Asking for repetition	Can use some or all of the following strategies to obtain meaning: • Relying on visual support and background knowledge • Predicting meaning based on context, prior knowledge, and/or experience • Relying on recognition of cognates, loanwords, and borrowed words May also recognize word family roots, prefixes, and suffixes
(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can understand culturally appropriate gestures and formulaic expressions in highly practiced applications. Can recognize opportunities for own turn (turn-taking conventions) only in highly practiced formulaic communication. May show awareness of the most obvious cultural differences, but may miss cues indicating miscommunication or inappropriateness.	Uses own culture to derive meaning from material that is heard or viewed. Has limited ability to distinguish between formal and informal forms except in rehearsed constructions.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Intermediate Level

At the Intermediate level, individuals can understand speech that conveys basic information on highly familiar or everyday topics such as meals, time, directions, simple transactions, and personal information. This speech is simple, minimally connected, and contains high-frequency vocabulary. Individuals at this level are generally able to comprehend one utterance at a time while engaged in face-to-face conversations or in routine listening tasks such as understanding highly contextualized messages, straightforward announcements, and simple instructions and directions. They may be able to distinguish some sounds and tones (in tonal languages) that differ from those characteristic of languages they already know, and to recognize levels of formality in simple phrases and expressions.

Individuals at the Intermediate level are most accurate in their comprehension when obtaining meaning from simple, straightforward speech. They require a controlled listening environment where they hear what they may expect to hear. They rely on redundancy, restatement, paraphrasing, and contextual clues, and use factors other than the oral message itself, such as gestures, visual supports, and familiarity with the situation or context, to facilitate listening comprehension.

Intermediate Low

At the Intermediate Low sublevel, individuals are able to understand some information from sentence-length speech, one utterance at a time, in basic personal and social contexts, though comprehension is often uneven. At the Intermediate Low sublevel, individuals show little or no comprehension of oral texts typically understood by listeners at the Advanced level.

Intermediate Mid

At the Intermediate Mid sublevel, individuals are able to understand simple, sentence-length speech, one utterance at a time, in a variety of basic personal and social contexts. Comprehension is most often accurate with highly familiar and predictable topics, although a few misunderstandings may occur. Individuals at this level may derive some meaning from oral messages typically understood by listeners at the Advanced level.

Intermediate High

At the Intermediate High sublevel, individuals are able to understand, with ease and confidence, simple sentence-length speech in basic personal and social contexts. They can derive substantial meaning from some connected passages typically understood by listeners at the Advanced level. However, there often will be gaps in understanding due to limited knowledge of the vocabulary and structures of the spoken language.

Correlations with Performance

Table 4 outlines the parameters of performance for Intermediate-level listening in Interpersonal and Interpretive modes of communication.

Table 4. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Listening—Intermediate Level

Overall Description		
Understands main ideas and some supporting details on familiar topics from a variety of straightforward oral message types.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Interpretive Mode**
Functions	Can comprehend sufficiently to manage familiar survival and transactional situations and respond to requests for personal information and preferences. Consistently able to maintain a conversation to satisfy basic needs or handle a simple transaction. May show emerging evidence of the ability to comprehend oral messages about more than the "here and now."	Can follow oral input related to familiar, routine tasks such as understanding announcements, instructions, directions, and other highly contextualized messages. Can comprehend simple stories and short descriptive messages within familiar contexts. May show emerging evidence of the ability to identify key details from the spoken text.
Contexts and Content	Can comprehend messages related to basic personal and social needs and relevant to the immediate environment, such as self, others, and the immediate environment. Can comprehend main ideas and identify some supporting details.	
Discourse Type	Able to understand discrete sentences and some short paragraph-length messages. Can understand some connectors that show sentence relationships.	Comprehends information-rich spoken texts that have highly predictable order.
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can understand straightforward language that contains mostly familiar structures, and a variety of questions. Can recognize language structures and articulation/stress/ intonation patterns.	Has sufficient control of the structures and conventions of oral language to understand short, non-complex messages on familiar topics.
Vocabulary	Can understand high-frequency vocabulary and idiomatic expressions related to everyday topics, topics of personal interest, and topics that are familiar or have been studied.	
Communication Strategies	Can recognize when clarification is needed or miscommunication occurs. May use some or all of the following strategies: • Using visual support and background knowledge • Predicting meaning based on context, prior knowledge, and/or experience • Using context clues • Recognizing word family roots, prefixes, and suffixes • Making comparisons with other known languages	
(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can recognize some culturally appropriate vocabulary, expressions, and gestures when participating in everyday interactions. Can identify the application of turn-taking conventions in conversation. Recognizes that differences exist in cultural behaviors and perspectives and can conform in familiar situations.	Generally relies heavily on knowledge of familiar cultural norms and expectations, with increasing knowledge of the relevant culture(s) to interpret texts that are heard or viewed. Able to distinguish levels of formality only in simple phrases and expressions. Cannot easily understand mood, feeling, or emotion conveyed in speech.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Advanced Level

At the Advanced level, individuals can understand the main ideas and most supporting details in connected discourse on a variety of general interest topics, such as news stories, explanations, instructions, anecdotes, and travelogue descriptions. They can understand connected speech that is lexically and structurally uncomplicated and is organized in a clear and predictable way. Listeners at this level have sufficient knowledge of language structure to understand basic time-frame references. Their understanding is often limited to concrete, conventional discourse, although they may also derive some meaning from oral texts that are more abstract in nature if they possess significant familiarity with the topic or context.

Individuals at the Advanced level usually understand standard pronunciation, but not the implications of stress, intonation, and tone (in tonal languages). They understand basic social norms and etiquette, can recognize formal and informal forms of speech, and sometimes understand references to major historical or cultural events. These individuals demonstrate some understanding of frequently used rhetorical devices, such as repetition and exaggeration, and they may be able to recognize some mood, feeling, emotion, or position in speech. They are able to compensate for limitations in their lexical and structural control of the language by using background knowledge and contextual clues.

Advanced Low

At the Advanced Low sublevel, individuals are able to understand short conventional narrative and descriptive oral texts with a clear underlying structure, though their comprehension may be uneven. The individual understands the main facts and some supporting details. Comprehension derives primarily from an increasing overall facility with the language, though it is still supported by situational and subject-matter knowledge.

Advanced Mid

At the Advanced Mid sublevel, individuals are able to understand conventional narrative and descriptive discourse in familiar patterns, such as expanded descriptions of persons, places, and things, and narrations about past, present, and future events. Individuals understand the main facts and many supporting details. Comprehension derives not only from situational and subject-matter knowledge, but also from an increasing overall facility with the language itself.

Advanced High

At the Advanced High sublevel, individuals are able to understand, with ease and confidence, conventional narrative and descriptive texts of any length, as well as complex factual material such as summaries or reports. At this sublevel individuals are able to comprehend the facts presented in oral discourse and are often able to recognize speaker-intended inferences that would be understood by listeners at the Superior level. However, there are likely to be gaps in their comprehension of complex discourse on abstract topics. Listeners at the Advanced High sublevel are typically able to follow some of the essential points of more complex or argumentative speech in areas of special interest or knowledge. In addition, they are able to derive some meaning from oral messages that deal with unfamiliar topics or situations. However, they are not able to demonstrate these Superior-level listening skills consistently.

Correlations with Performance

Table 5 outlines the parameters of performance for Advanced-level listening in Interpersonal and Interpretive modes of communication.

Table 5. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Listening—Advanced Level

Overall Description		
Understands main ideas and supporting details on familiar and some new, concrete topics from a variety of more complex texts that have a clear, organized structure.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Interpretive Mode**
Functions	Can comprehend the main idea and supporting details of narrative, descriptive, and straightforward persuasive oral discourse in all major time frames. Can follow when narration or conversation includes an unexpected turn of events. May show emerging evidence of the ability to participate in discussions about issues beyond the concrete.	
Contexts and Content	Can derive meaning effectively from oral messages heard in personal, work-related, and general contexts. Can comprehend oral messages pertaining to concrete, practical topics that are relevant to personal, social, work-related, community, national, and international contexts.	
Discourse Type	Can understand discourse in full oral paragraphs that are organized, cohesive, and detailed, such as anecdotes, descriptions, oral news stories, oral presentations, and other oral texts dealing with topics of a concrete nature.	
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can interact efficiently and effectively with a variety of communication partners. Understands most language spoken in standard dialect and at normal speed; has difficulty understanding rapid spoken language and non-standard accents/dialects.	Can fully understand complex and descriptive discourse with connected language and cohesive devices. Can derive meaning by: • Understanding sequencing, time frames, and chronology • Classifying words or concepts according to word order or grammatical use Understands most language spoken in standard dialect and at normal speed; has difficulty understanding rapid spoken language and non-standard accents/dialects.
Vocabulary	Can comprehend a broad range of vocabulary related to school, employment, topics of personal interest, current events, and matters of public and community interest.	Can comprehend generic and some specific vocabulary and structures, specialized and precise vocabulary on topics related to experience, and many common idiomatic expressions.
Communication Strategies	Can use a range of strategies to maintain communication. Able to • Request clarification • Repeat, restate, and rephrase • Use known language to compensate for missing vocabulary (circumlocution)	Can adapt strategies for own purposes. Can use some or all of the following strategies: • Draw on visual support and background knowledge • Predict meaning based on context, prior knowledge, and/or experience • Use context clues • Identify the organizing principle of the discourse • Differentiate main ideas from supporting details • Make inferences using context and linguistic features

(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can use cultural knowledge to recognize linguistic and behavioral conventions in many social and work-related interactions. Can demonstrate conscious awareness of significant cultural differences and attempt to adjust accordingly.	Can use knowledge of cultural conventions to interpret discourse that is heard or viewed.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Superior Level

At the Superior level, individuals are able to follow reasoned oral argumentation expressed through supported opinion, conjecture, and hypothesis. They can process oral communication that deals with abstract concepts, contains cultural references, and uses specialized vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. These individuals can understand formal and informal spoken language on general social and professional topics, and can comprehend linguistically complex extended discourse such as that found in academic and professional settings, lectures, speeches, and briefings.

Individuals at the Superior level are able to follow cohesive discourse with clear relationships of ideas given in a standard dialect, as found in genres such as speeches, lectures, and briefings. Their ability to comprehend oral texts on less familiar topics comes from a command of the language that is supported by a broad vocabulary, an understanding of more complex structures, and linguistic and intercultural experience. They understand commonly used rhetorical devices such as simile and metaphor, and at times they can understand not only what is said, but what is left unsaid; that is, they can make inferences.

Listeners at the Superior level understand widely used idiomatic expressions and cultural references. They also understand the cultural norms and expectations that commonly apply in routine and professional speech, as well as the use of formal and informal forms of speech and the other social conventions that apply in various settings. They generally understand the mood, feeling, emotion, or stance expressed in oral communication, including emotional overtones such as the use of irony, sarcasm, or humor.

The Distinguished Level

At the Distinguished level, individuals are able to recognize oral language used for purposes of negotiation, persuasion, advising, and representation of another person or position, and they can understand a wide variety of forms, styles, and registers of speech on highly specialized topics in language that is tailored to different audiences. They comprehend speech that can be highly abstract, highly technical, or both, as well as speech that contains very precise, often low-frequency vocabulary and complex rhetorical structures. Individuals at this level can understand the language of classical theater, art films, professional symposia, academic debates, public policy statements, literary readings, and most jokes and puns. This includes complex speech characterized by intentional shifts of topic and tone and many rhetorical devices used for effect or emphasis.

Individuals at the Distinguished level understand the implications of spoken texts in the broader cultural, political, or social contexts of the intended audience. They are able to comprehend implicit information, tone, and point of view, can follow highly persuasive arguments, and can appreciate a speaker's use of nuance and subtlety. They are able to understand unpredictable turns of thought related to sophisticated topics. In addition, their listening ability is enhanced by a broad and deep understanding of cultural references and allusions.

At this level, listeners comprehend oral discourse that is lengthy and dense, structurally complex, rich in cultural reference, idiomatic, and colloquial. They can understand many complex structures, including complex embedding. They have an extensive understanding of vocabulary, including many low frequency words and phrases and many cultural references, and they understand a number of variations in pronunciation patterns, stress, intonation, and tone (in tonal languages). They usually understand the subtleties and nuances of mood, feeling, emotion, or stance, including emotional overtones, such as the use of irony, sarcasm, or humor. Listeners at the Distinguished level are able to appreciate the richness of the spoken language.

ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES 2024 – READING

Overview

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Reading (the Guidelines) describe an individual's ability to use reading skills and strategies to accomplish communication objectives. Reading is an actively interpretive skill in which individuals comprehend on the basis of the amount and type of information they can retrieve from what they read and the inferences and connections that they can make. The Guidelines recognize the active nature of reading by describing the tasks that readers can accomplish with different types of written texts and under different circumstances. They do not describe how reading skills develop, how one learns[1] to read, or the actual cognitive processes involved. Rather, they describe what readers understand from what they read and how their reading skills enable them to understand it.

An individual's level of proficiency in reading is defined by four criteria, represented by the acronym **FACT**:

- **F**unctions and tasks: The types of reading activities that the individual can carry out, such as recognizing words and phrases, following written instructions, or interacting with professional colleagues in an online discussion forum.
- **A**ccuracy: The degree to which the individual can use linguistic features (including grammar and syntax, vocabulary, conventions of print such as punctuation and font differences, discourse structure, sociocultural knowledge, and more) to process written messages.
- **C**ontext and content: The situations or circumstances in which the individual can achieve reading goals, and the topic areas that the individual is able to handle.
- **T**ext type: The length and complexity of written text that the individual can understand and process, ranging from words and phrases to sentences, paragraphs, and multi-paragraph discourse.

The reading proficiency levels are primarily differentiated by the functions and tasks (**F**) that an individual at each level can carry out consistently. With effort and exposure to the language over time, an individual develops the degree of accuracy (**A**) and control of context and content (**C**) and text type (**T**) that are required to accomplish increasingly complex functions and tasks. In order to receive a rating for reading at a given proficiency level, an individual must demonstrate sustained ability to meet each of the FACT criteria for that level in all of the communication situations that pertain to that level, including situations that the individual has not encountered previously.

The Major Levels and the Sublevels

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines characterize the development of reading proficiency as a continuum with five major levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished. Each level represents a range of ability (what an individual can do when reading) that includes all of the abilities that characterize the prior levels. The descriptors for each level outline what the individual is able to do

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[1] Learning, in this document, refers to the overall process of gaining an additional language, not to learning as used as a construct in a dichotomy of learning or acquiring language.

consistently whenever using the language, regardless of context, topic, or previous experience with the situation.

At each major level, the Guidelines provide a summary description of the criteria for reading proficiency at that level, including functions and task types (**F**), application of linguistic, sociocultural, and strategic knowledge (**A**), relevant situations and topic areas (**C**), and discourse types (**T**). Each description leads with functions and tasks because these are the main features that distinguish the major levels from one another.

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, short written descriptions of Low, Mid, and High sublevels are also included.

- **Low**: Baseline performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel have consistent ability to meet the criteria for the level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may demonstrate some hesitation in doing so, but they are able to sustain communication with regard to all of the criteria. They demonstrate little ability to carry out communication functions that typify the next-higher major level.
- **Mid**: Solid performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel demonstrate skill in carrying out the functions of the major level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may also exhibit partial ability to carry out communication tasks that typify the next-higher major level.
- **High**: Performance with quality and quantity at the level. Individuals at this sublevel communicate with ease and confidence when performing the functions of the level. They are capable of functioning much of the time at the next higher major level, but they are unable to sustain language at that level without evidence of difficulty.

The sublevels facilitate understanding of the nature of each major level as representing a range of proficiency. They indicate how well the individual meets the criteria for the major level, and also how close the individual's proficiency is to sustaining the criteria for the next major level. The subdivision thus reflects the fact that over time and with practice an individual's proficiency takes on the characteristics of the next higher level. In formal educational situations, reference to the sublevels helps learners and teachers set realistic expectations, see evidence of progress, and recognize the complex nature of language learning.

Correlations with Performance

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, the Guidelines for Reading also provide tables with the characteristics of performance at the relevant level as outlined in the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners*. The performance descriptor tables use the label *parameters for performance*[2] for the aspects of language use that an individual can demonstrate.

For reading, the performance descriptors are organized in terms of the Interpersonal and Interpretive modes of communication, as defined in Table 1.

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[2] The *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* also use the term "domain" for the parameters. This term has been omitted here to avoid potential confusion with its use as an overarching label for listening, speaking, reading, and writing in other contexts. See the Overview of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024 for information on the relationship between the FACT criteria and the parameters for performance.

Table 1. Modes of Communication Relevant to Reading Proficiency

	Interpersonal	Interpretive
Definition	Two-way or multiple-way communication that allows for active negotiation of meaning among individuals.	One-way communication with no direct opportunity for active negotiation of meaning with the writer or producer.
Participant role(s)	Review and monitor the texts produced by other participant(s) to see how meanings and intentions are being communicated; request and provide adjustments as needed.	Interpret what the writer or producer wants the receiver of the message to understand.
Skill areas and examples	Reading and writing (texting and instant messaging; group work in academic contexts; collaborative writing in professional contexts).	Reading (online, on presentation screen, or on paper).

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012), page 7.

The inclusion of the performance descriptor tables at the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels is intended to facilitate understanding of the relationship between proficiency and performance for instructors and learners in formal educational settings where the Performance Descriptors are used to set learning goals and measure progress.

- *Proficiency*: Ability to engage in communication tasks in all situations relevant to the level, including those that have not been encountered previously.
- *Performance*: Ability to engage in communication tasks that are relevant to the level and have been presented and rehearsed in instruction or in another structured context.

The *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* parallel the FACT criteria for proficiency as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation of Proficiency Criteria with Parameters of Performance

FACT Criterion (Proficiency)	Parameter (Performance)
Functions	Functions
Context and Content	Contexts and Content
Text Type	Discourse Type
Accuracy (one single criterion)	Comprehension and Comprehensibility (4 sub-parameters) • *Language Control* • *Vocabulary* • *Communication Strategies* • *Cultural Awareness*

The Guidelines for Reading do not include performance descriptor tables for the Superior and Distinguished levels because the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* do not include descriptors for these levels. At the Superior and Distinguished levels, an individual's abilities with regard to tasks and functions, context and content, and text type have broadened and deepened sufficiently that prior learning and rehearsal (as in performance) as opposed to language use in situations that have not been encountered previously is no longer a meaningful distinction.

The Novice Level

At the Novice level, readers can understand key words and cognates, as well as formulaic phrases that are highly contextualized. Readers at the Novice level are able to obtain a limited amount of information from highly predictable texts in which the topic or context is very familiar, such as a street sign, a store receipt, or a photo caption. Individuals at the Novice level may rely heavily on their own background knowledge and on extralinguistic support (such as photo imagery or the format of a store receipt) to derive meaning.

Readers at the Novice level are best able to understand a text when they can anticipate the information it contains. At the Novice level, recognition of key words, cognates, formulaic phrases, and familiar formats makes comprehension possible.

Novice Low

At the Novice Low sublevel, readers are beginning to learn the basics of the language and are able to recognize a limited number of letters, symbols, or characters. They are occasionally able to identify high-frequency words and/or phrases when reading is strongly supported by context.

Novice Mid

At the Novice Mid sublevel, readers are able to recognize the letters or symbols of an alphabetic or syllabic writing system or a limited number of characters in a character-based language. They can identify a number of highly contextualized words and phrases including cognates and borrowed words, but they rarely understand material that exceeds a single phrase. Rereading is often required.

Novice High

At the Novice High sublevel, readers can understand, fully and with relative ease, key words and cognates, as well as formulaic phrases across a range of highly contextualized texts. Where vocabulary has been rehearsed, they can understand predictable language and messages such as those found in text messages and on street signs. Readers at the Novice High sublevel are often able to derive meaning from short, non-complex texts that convey basic information for which there is contextual or extralinguistic support, as readers at the Intermediate level do, but they are not able to do so across all types of reading situations.

Correlations with Performance

Table 3 outlines the parameters of performance for Novice-level reading in Interpersonal and Interpretive modes of communication.

Table 3. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Reading—Novice Level

Overall Description		
Understands words, phrases, and formulaic language that have been learned and rehearsed. Can obtain the meaning of the main idea from simple, highly predictable written texts, with strong visual or other contextual support.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Interpretive Mode**
Functions	Can recognize highly predictable and formulaic statements and questions that have been learned and rehearsed. May show emerging evidence of ability to comprehend in simple written exchanges such as text messages.	Comprehends meaning by recognizing key words and formulaic phrases that are highly contextualized and have been rehearsed. May show emerging evidence of ability to understand simple messages based on background and prior knowledge.
Contexts and Content	Can comprehend in some personally relevant contexts on topics that relate to basic biographical information.	Can comprehend texts with highly predictable, familiar content and contexts (those related to personal background, prior knowledge, or personal experiences).
Discourse Type	Can comprehend texts ranging in length from lists to phrases to simple sentences when the topic is familiar or the information is supported by visuals or graphic organization. Can comprehend formulaic or rehearsed written questions, such as those on personal information forms.	
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can usually comprehend highly rehearsed and basic texts when supported by visual or contextual clues, redundancy, or repetition, and when the message contains familiar structures. Reading fluency and comprehension are strongly influenced where reading involves use of a writing system that differs from those already known.	Primarily relies on vocabulary to derive meaning from written texts. May derive meaning by recognizing structural patterns that have been practiced in familiar and some new contexts. Reading fluency and comprehension are strongly influenced where reading involves use of a writing system that differs from those already known.
Vocabulary	Can understand a number of high frequency words, extensively rehearsed expressions, and formulaic questions and statements.	Can comprehend highly predictable vocabulary, a limited number of words related to familiar topics, and formulaic expressions.
Communication Strategies	Can use some or all of the following strategies to maintain communication: • Relying on visual support and background knowledge • Imitating or repeating modeled words • Using another language • Asking (in writing) for repetition or restatement	Can use some or all of the following strategies: • Relying on visual support and background knowledge • Skimming and scanning • Predicting meaning based on context, prior knowledge, and/or experience • Relying on recognition of cognates, loanwords, and borrowed words May also recognize word family roots, prefixes, and suffixes.
(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can use culturally appropriate formulaic expressions in extensively rehearsed applications. May show awareness of the most obvious cultural differences or prohibitions, but may miss cues indicating miscommunication or inappropriateness.	Uses own culture to derive meaning from material that is read. Has limited ability to distinguish between formal and informal forms except in rehearsed constructions.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Intermediate Level

At the Intermediate level, individuals can understand information conveyed in simple, predictable texts. Readers rely heavily on contextual clues. They can most easily understand information if the format of the text is familiar, such as in a weather report or a social announcement.

Readers at the Intermediate level are able to understand texts that convey basic information such as that found in announcements, notices, and online collaborative tools and forums. These texts are not complex and have a predictable pattern of presentation. The discourse is minimally connected and primarily organized in individual sentences and strings of sentences containing mostly high-frequency vocabulary.

At this level, readers are most accurate when obtaining meaning from simple, straightforward texts. They are able to understand messages found in highly familiar, everyday contexts. At this level, readers may not fully understand texts that are detailed or texts in which knowledge of language structures is essential in order to understand sequencing, time frame, and chronology.

Intermediate Low

At the Intermediate Low sublevel, readers are able to understand some information from the simplest connected texts dealing with a limited number of personal and social needs, although there may be frequent misunderstandings. Readers at this sublevel will be challenged to derive meaning from connected texts of any length.

Intermediate Mid

At the Intermediate Mid sublevel, readers are able to understand short, non-complex texts that convey simple information and deal with basic personal and social topics to which the reader brings personal interest or knowledge, although some misunderstandings may occur. Readers at this sublevel may obtain some meaning from short connected texts that feature description and narration and deal with familiar topics.

Intermediate High

At the Intermediate High sublevel, readers are able to understand, fully and with ease, short, non-complex texts that convey basic information and deal with personal and social topics to which the reader brings personal interest or knowledge. These readers are also able to understand some connected texts featuring description and narration as readers at the Advanced level do, although there will be occasional gaps in understanding due to a limited knowledge of the vocabulary, structures, and writing conventions of the language.

Correlations with Performance

Table 4 outlines the parameters of performance for Intermediate-level reading in Interpersonal and Interpretive modes of communication.

Table 4. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Reading—Intermediate Level

Overall Description		
Understands main ideas and some supporting details on familiar topics from a variety of texts. Can comprehend written sentences and sentence strings about self, others, and everyday life.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Interpretive Mode**
Functions	Can comprehend well enough to manage survival and transactional situations, understand questions about personal information and preferences, and maintain text-based interactions on basic needs, simple social communications, and simple transactions. May show emerging evidence of ability to communicate on general interest and school- or work-related topics.	Can follow written input related to familiar, routine tasks such as reading announcements, instructions, directions, and other highly contextualized messages. Can comprehend simple stories, routine correspondence, short descriptive texts, and other text-based selections within familiar contexts. May show emerging evidence of the ability to identify key details from the written text.
Contexts and Content	Can derive meaning in written interactions dealing with familiar contexts and topics relevant to the self, others, and the immediate environment. Can handle short written social interactions.	Can understand main ideas and some supporting details on familiar topics from a variety of texts. Can comprehend information related to basic personal and social needs and relevant to the immediate environment, such as self and everyday life, school, community, and particular interests.
Discourse Type	Can comprehend discrete sentences and sentence strings. Can understand some connectors that show sentence relationships.	Can comprehend simple stories, routine correspondence, short descriptive texts, and other selections within familiar contexts. Generally comprehends connected sentences and some paragraph-like discourse. Can comprehend information-rich texts that have highly predictable order.
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can understand straightforward language that contains mostly familiar structures including a variety of questions. Control of language structures and writing system (orthography) is sufficient to ensure reading comprehension in many situations, though some miscommunication may occur.	Can understand fully and with ease short, non-complex written texts on familiar topics; has limited ability to understand more complex texts. May derive meaning by comparing language structures with those of other known languages or recognizing structural parallels between new and familiar languages.
Vocabulary	Can understand high-frequency vocabulary on a variety of everyday topics, topics of personal interest, and topics that are familiar or have been studied.	Can comprehend high-frequency vocabulary related to everyday topics and high-frequency idiomatic expressions.
Communication Strategies	Can recognize when clarification is needed or miscommunication occurs. May use some or all of the following strategies: • Using visual support and background knowledge • Predicting meaning based on context, prior knowledge, and/or experience • Using context clues • Recognizing word family roots, prefixes, and suffixes • Making comparisons with other known languages • For non-alphabetic languages, recognizing radicals	

(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can recognize some culturally appropriate vocabulary and expressions when engaging in everyday interactions. Recognizes that differences exist in cultural behaviors and perspectives and can conform in familiar situations.	Can distinguish levels of formality only in simple phrases and expressions. Generally relies heavily on knowledge of familiar cultural norms and expectations to interpret written texts. Cannot easily understand mood, feeling, or emotion conveyed in writing.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Advanced Level

At the Advanced level, readers can understand the main idea and supporting details of narrative and descriptive texts that have a clear and predictable structure and pertain to topics of general interest, such as news articles, blog posts, and travelogue descriptions. Comprehension is also supported by knowledge of the conventions of the language, such as noun/adjective agreement and verb placement. Readers at this level are able to compensate for limitations in their lexical and structural knowledge by using contextual clues.

Readers at the Advanced level demonstrate independence in their ability to read subject matter that is new to them. They have sufficient control of standard linguistic conventions to understand sequencing, time frames, and chronology. These individuals demonstrate some understanding of frequently used rhetorical devices, such as repetition and exaggeration, and they may be able to recognize some mood, feeling, emotion, or position in writing. When familiar with the subject matter, readers at the Advanced level are also able to derive some meaning from argumentative texts. However, they are often challenged by texts in which topics are treated abstractly.

Advanced Low

At the Advanced Low sublevel, readers are able to understand conventional narrative and descriptive texts with a clear underlying structure and mostly high-frequency vocabulary. These readers understand the main ideas and some supporting details. Comprehension may derive substantially from situational and subject-matter knowledge. Readers at this sublevel are challenged to comprehend more complex texts.

Advanced Mid

At the Advanced Mid sublevel, readers are able to understand conventional descriptions of persons, places, and things as well as narrations about past, present, and future events. These readers comprehend the main ideas and many supporting details of factual material, and their knowledge of the conventions of the written form of the language enables them to predict what they are going to read. Comprehension derives largely from knowledge of the language itself, though it is still supported by situational and subject-matter knowledge. Readers at this sublevel may derive some meaning from texts that are structurally and/or conceptually more complex.

Advanced High

At the Advanced High sublevel, readers are able to understand, fully and with ease, conventional narrative and descriptive texts of any length as well as more complex factual material. Their emerging awareness of the aesthetic properties and literary styles of the language permits them to comprehend a wide variety of texts. These readers are able to go beyond comprehension of the facts in a text and begin to recognize author-intended inferences. They can approach the Superior level in their ability to follow essential points of argumentative texts in areas of special interest or knowledge, and to understand parts of texts that deal with unfamiliar topics or situations, but they cannot fully sustain this level across all documents. Misunderstandings may occur when they are reading texts that are structurally and/or conceptually more complex.

Correlations with Performance

Table 5 outlines the parameters of performance for Advanced-level reading in Interpersonal and Interpretive modes of communication.

Table 5. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Reading—Advanced Level

Overall Description		
Understands main ideas and supporting details on familiar and some new, concrete topics from complex texts that have a clear, organized structure. Can understand paragraph-length written texts about events with detail and organization. Derives sufficient meaning to comprehend and manage situations with an unexpected complication.		
Parameters of Performance	**Interpersonal Mode**	**Interpretive Mode**
Functions	Can participate in written exchanges with ease and confidence by understanding narrations and descriptions in all major time frames. Can follow when a written narrative or descriptive exchange includes an unexpected turn of events.	Can comprehend the main idea and supporting details of narrative, descriptive, and straightforward persuasive written texts in all major time frames. Can follow when narration or description includes an unexpected turn of events.
Contexts and Content	Can function fully and effectively in personal and general contexts. Can comprehend written texts pertaining to concrete topics that are relevant to personal, social, work-related, community, national, and international contexts.	
Discourse Type	Can understand paragraph-level written text that is organized, cohesive, and detailed. Can understand details beyond the main idea.	Can comprehend paragraph-level written text such as that found in stories, straightforward literary works, personal and work-related correspondence, descriptions, and other written texts dealing with topics of a concrete nature.
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can consistently control basic high-frequency structures. Language control is sufficient to understand written communication from a variety of communication partners. Can read written material that uses standard printed or electronic writing systems.	Can control language (vocabulary, structures, language conventions) sufficiently to fully understand paragraph-length texts with connected language and cohesive devices. Can derive meaning by: • Understanding sequencing, time frames, and chronology • Classifying words or concepts according to word order or grammatical use Can read written material that uses standard printed or electronic writing systems.
Vocabulary	Can comprehend a broad range of vocabulary related to school, work, topics of personal interest, current events, and matters of public and community interest.	Can comprehend generic and some specific vocabulary, specialized and precise vocabulary on topics related to experience, and many common idiomatic expressions.
Communication Strategies	Can use some or all of the following strategies: • Draw on visual support and background knowledge • Predict meaning based on context, prior knowledge, and/or experience • Use context clues • Identify the organizing principle of the text • Differentiate main ideas from supporting details • Use known language to compensate for unknown vocabulary (circumlocution)	

(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can understand the role of cultural considerations in many social and work-related written interactions.	Can recognize formal and informal types of writing. Can use knowledge of cultural differences, as well as increasing cultural understanding, to interpret written texts.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Superior Level

At the Superior level, readers are able to understand written texts from many genres dealing with a wide range of subjects, both familiar and unfamiliar. Comprehension comes from a command of the language that is supported by a broad vocabulary, an understanding of complex structures, and knowledge of the culture. Readers at the Superior level can draw inferences from textual and extralinguistic clues.

Readers at the Superior level are able to understand lengthy texts of a professional, academic, or literary nature, including those that use abstract language and feature argumentation, supported opinion, and/or hypothesis. They comprehend texts that use precise or specialized vocabulary and complex grammatical structures, and they recognize the meanings of rhetorical devices. In addition, these readers are generally aware of the aesthetic properties of the language and its literary styles, but may not fully understand texts in which cultural references and assumptions are deeply embedded.

The Distinguished Level

At the Distinguished level, readers can understand a wide variety of written texts from many genres, including professional, technical, academic, and literary. These texts are characterized by one or more of the following: a high level of abstraction; precision or uniqueness of vocabulary; density of information; cultural reference; or complexity of structure. At this level, readers are able to comprehend implicit and inferred information, tone, and point of view, and they can follow persuasive arguments. They are able to understand unpredictable turns of thought related to sophisticated topics.

Readers at the Distinguished level are able to understand writing tailored to specific audiences as well as a number of historical, regional, and colloquial variations of the language. They understand and appreciate texts that use highly precise low-frequency vocabulary as well as complex rhetorical structures to convey subtle or highly specialized information. Such texts are typically essay length but may be excerpts from more lengthy documents.

Readers at the Distinguished level comprehend language from within the cultural framework and are able to understand a writer's use of nuance and subtlety. Although they may have some difficulty fully understanding certain nonstandard varieties, these readers are able to appreciate the richness of the written language.