

Proficiency for Parents

Shelby County Schools ♦ Secondary World Language Program ♦ www.SCSWorldlanguages.weebly.com

What is Proficiency?

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages adapted Government Language Skill Descriptions for the U.S. academic community. Now in its third edition, schools and teachers are shifting their focus from what students know in or about a foreign language to what they can do with what they know. These standards have been further drilled down for K-12 use making up the Performance Descriptors. The ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners are designed to describe language performance that is the result of explicit instruction in an instructional setting. There are two main benefits to using the Performance Descriptors for Language Learners:

1. They help language educators create performance tasks targeted to the appropriate performance range, while challenging learners to also use strategies from the next higher range. These Performance Descriptors also help educators set realistic expectations at the summative assessment level.
2. Language learners benefit by understanding the ranges of performance, which describe a pathway for learners to keep track of progress made, to identify domains needing additional practice, and to gain a clear understanding of how to move into the next higher range of performance.



Proficiency Scale

Annual Target

Each major category is separated into 3 sublevels: low, mid & high.

Advanced

AL

AM

AH

Speakers at the Advanced level engage in conversation to communicate information on personal topics, as well as topics of community, national, or international interest. The topics are handled concretely in the major time frames of past, present, and future. These speakers can also deal with a social situation with an unexpected complication. The language of Advanced-level speakers is abundant and they usually speak in paragraphs.

Example: I can give a clear and detailed story about childhood memories, such as what happened during vacations or memorable events and answer questions about my story. I can clear up a major personal, school, or work place misunderstanding.

Intermediate

IL

IM

IH

Speakers at the Intermediate level can create with language when talking about familiar topics related to their daily life. They are able to recombine learned material in order to express personal meaning. Intermediate-level speakers can ask simple questions and can handle a straightforward survival situation. They produce sentence-level language, ranging from discrete sentences to strings of sentences, typically in present time.

Example: I can talk about my daily routine. I can give reasons for my preferences. I can schedule an appointment.

Novice

NL

NM

NH

Novice-level speakers can communicate short messages on highly predictable, everyday topics that affect them directly. They do so primarily through the use of isolated words and phrases that have been encountered, memorized, and recalled. Novice-level speakers may be difficult to understand even by the most sympathetic listeners accustomed to non-native speech.

Example: I can introduce myself and others. I can answer questions about what I like and dislike. I can talk about what I eat, learn, and do.

Oral Proficiency Levels in the Work World

ACTFL Level	US Gov	Language Functions	Corresponding Professions/Positions	Examples of Who Is Likely to Function at the Level?
Distinguished	5 4	<i>Ability to tailor language to specific audience, persuade, negotiate. Deal with nuance and subtlety.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diplomat, Contract Negotiator, International Specialist, Translator/Interpreter, Intelligence Specialist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly articulate, professionally specialized native speakers; L2 learners with extended (17 years) and current professional and/or educational experience in the target culture
Superior	3	<i>Discuss topics extensively, support opinions, hypothesize. Deal with linguistically unfamiliar situation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University FL Professor, Business Executive, Lawyer, Judge, Financial Advisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-educated native speakers Educated L2 learners with extended professional and/or educational experience in the target language environment
Advanced High	2+	<i>Narrate and describe in past, present and future and deal effectively with an unanticipated complication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physician, Military Linguist, Senior Consultant, Human Resources Personnel, Financial Broker, Translation Officer, Marketing Manager, Communications Consultant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> L2 learners with graduate degrees in language- related area and extended educational experience in target environment Heritage speakers, informal learners, non-academic learners who have significant contact with language Undergraduate language majors with year-long study abroad experience
Advanced Mid	2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fraud Specialist, Account Executive, Court Stenographer /Interpreter, Benefits Specialist, Technical Service Agent, Collection Representative, Estimating Coordinator 	
Advanced Low			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer Service Agent, Social Worker, Claims Processor, K-12 Language Teacher, Police Officer, Maintenance Administrator, Billing Clerk, Legal Secretary, Legal Receptionist 	
Intermediate High	1+	<i>Create with language, initiate, maintain and bring to a close simple conversations by asking and responding to simple questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Auto Inspector, Aviation Personnel, Missionary, Tour guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undergraduate language majors without year-long study abroad experience. L2 learners after 6-8 year sequences of study (AP, etc.) or 4-6 semester college sequence L2 learners after 4 year high school sequence or 2 semester college sequence
Intermediate Mid	1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cashier, Sales clerk (highly predictable contexts) 	
Intermediate Low			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receptionist, Housekeeping Staff. 	
Novice High Novice Mid Novice Low	0+ 0	<i>Communicate minimally with formulaic and rote utterances, lists and phrases</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> L2 learners after 2 years of high school language study

View the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 at <http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/>

How can you HELP your language learner?

While you may not speak the language your student is learning you can still help! Try one or all of the following to ensure your student's success!

- Expose your children to people from varied language and cultural backgrounds.
- Participate in events where language and cultural diversity are celebrated.
- If you speak a language other than English, use it with your children.
- Speak positively to your children about the value of learning another language.
- Provide videos, music, and books in other languages.
- Send your children to summer language camps. For older children, consider programs in which they can study languages abroad.
- Investigate opportunities for formal language study for your children, beginning as early as preschool and extending through their high school years.
- If your child is participating in a language program, talk to the teacher about what you can do at home to reinforce the learning that takes place in the classroom.

How can you SUPPORT your school's language program?

It is important to communicate regularly with decision makers in your school system BEFORE budget cuts become a concern. Establishing a history of being a successful program is important to maintaining the programs long-term health and parents are the most important stakeholders in this process! Consider the following:

- Get involved yourself at the school level. Ask your student's teacher how you can best support the program!
- Communicate regularly (in writing) with your Board Commissioners about program successes and why it is important for your child.
- Have your PTA invite the Superintendent and Board Commissioners to attend a language class or program at your school.
- Reinforce existing language programs by expressing support for them to state and national representatives.
- If your child's school does not have a language program, talk with other parents, PTA members, and the principal about getting one started.

