

# Managing Your Language Learning Program

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[Keywords: goals (proficiency), managing language learning]

## Summary

This book gives extensive information on how to manage your own language learning program. It advises you how to set goals, make plans, monitor the learning process, evaluate progress, and identify and solve language learning problems. The information in this book gives you detailed information that can help you be a self-directed language learner.

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## How to manage your language learning program

### Introduction

Most people do not give much thought to the management of a personal language learning program. In traditional language school situations the language learner lets the curriculum designer and teacher set goals, plan, and evaluate the program.

By learning to manage your own program, you can

- take charge of your own learning

- make sure your program will meet your goals
- increase your motivation, and
- increase the likelihood of continuing to learn after any formal study is over.

## Steps

1. Set your language learning goals.  
**See:** How to set your language learning goals
2. Make a strategic language learning plan.  
**See:** Making a strategic plan for language learning
3. Monitor the language learning process as you implement your plan.  
**See:** Monitoring the language learning process
4. Check your progress.  
**See:** Checking your progress
5. Identify and solve problems.  
**See:** How to identify and solve your language learning problems

## See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language learning program, managing language learning, motivation

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## How to set your language learning goals

### Introduction

### Steps

1. Make a detailed list of the situations and activities where you will use the language.  
**Tip:** If you are going overseas to work with an organization, ask specific questions about what you will do. You might be in a situation in which you will need to use more than one language. In that case, you will need to go through each step for each language.
2. List the basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, or writing) you need to

develop to handle situations and activities.

**Tip:** In most cases you want to develop all four skills, but in special circumstances you might concentrate only on reading or listening comprehension. If you only need to read articles or books in your new language, then you can concentrate only on the written language form. If you are going to live in a place where your new language is spoken, you will need listening and speaking skills in order to communicate. If the language is written and the population is literate, reading and writing skills will also be important.

3. Decide on a proficiency goal for each basic skill you need to develop.

**See:** Guidelines for setting proficiency goals for suggestions on the proficiency level that will meet your needs.

### See also

When you have set your goals, you will be ready to make a plan for reaching them. See Step 2:

- How to manage your language learning program
- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language skills (4 basic)

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## Making a strategic plan for language learning

### Introduction

Now that you know where you are headed (see How to set your language learning goals), how do you get there?

For most adults, the fastest way to achieve real fluency is exposure to the language in a combination of both structured and unstructured settings. Graded material, a structured setting, and the availability of a teacher or Language Associate to provide comprehensible input and correction can help novice learners get off to a good start.

As learning progresses, however, informal language exposure becomes more and more valuable, and formal lessons become relatively less important, but a systematic exploration of topics and cultural themes can be helpful at any stage.

This module will lead you through a series of steps to make a strategic plan that includes both structured and informal components to help you achieve your language learning goals.

### Steps

1. Size up the situation.

**See:** How to analyze the situation

2. Choose an approach to language acquisition that you think will work for you.

**See:** Choosing a language learning approach

#### *Structured component*

3. Decide on a strategy for structured language learning.

**See:** Deciding on a strategy for structured language learning

4. If you decide you want to create your own language learning program, then design it.

**See:** How to design a language and culture learning program

#### *Informal component*

5. Decide on strategies for informal practice.

**See:** Deciding on strategies for informal language practice

### **See also**

When you have made your strategic plan, you are ready to implement your plan. See step 3:

- How to manage your language learning program
- Keywords: formal language learning, goals (proficiency), informal language learning, language learning plan, objectives (instructional)

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## **How to analyze the situation**

### **Introduction**

In order to make a really effective strategic language learning plan you need to find out some information about the learners, the resources, the time frame, and the learning situation.

### **Things to do**

- Review what you learned about your learning style and personality factors.

**See:** How to discover your learning style

- Determine how much time is available to devote to learning the language.
- Determine what other constraints there are on the learning situation.

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## Choosing a language learning approach

### Introduction

People have differing views about the language acquisition process and prefer to go about it in different ways. The approach you take to language learning depends on your beliefs about language learning, your learning style and personality, and on the program you find most congenial.

### Things to do

- Read as much as you can about second language acquisition and the kinds of activities and conditions that favor it.  
**See:** Language Learning Principles
- Decide what your own beliefs are about language learning.  
**See:** Language learning beliefs questionnaire [PDF\(2\)](#)
- If you haven't already done so, investigate your learning style and its implications for language learning.  
**See:** How to discover your learning style and create a learning style profile
- Familiarize yourself with several approaches to language and culture learning.  
**See:** Ways to approach language learning
- Choose one of these approaches or some other approach to language learning that fits your beliefs and learning style.

### See also

- Keywords: Language Learning Beliefs Questionnaire, approaches to language learning, objectives (instructional), second language acquisition theory

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## Deciding on a strategy for structured language learning

### Introduction

Most people find that they benefit from some structure in their language learning. There are different ways to structure the learning and different options for kinds of programs. Remember that informal practice is also extremely important to language acquisition and complements a structured study program.

## Steps

1. Read descriptions of the different options.  
**See:** Structured language study options
2. Make a list of resources available for the study of the target language; for instance, language schools, correspondence courses, books, multimedia materials, computer programs.
3. Decide which of the options available to you best fits the approach you have decided to follow, your situation, and interests.
4. If you decide to go to language school, then choose what language school to attend.  
**See:** Deciding on a language school
5. If you decide to do independent study with commercially available materials, then choose the materials to use.  
**See:** Choosing language materials for independent study
6. If you decide to hire a tutor, then make yourself a set of guidelines for hiring and working with a tutor.  
**See:** Drawing up guidelines for hiring and working with a tutor
7. If you choose a do-it-yourself strategy, then design your program.  
**See:** How to design a language and culture learning program

## See also

- Keywords: formal language learning

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## Deciding on a language school

### Introduction

Once you've decide to go to language school, how do you decide which one to attend? The choice can depend on a number of factors, which you must weigh carefully against

each other.

## Guidelines

- Find out which schools your organization recommends or requires.
- Weigh the cost of each school.
- Find out about the instructional approach used in each school and see which one fits your preferences.
- Look at the daily timetable of each school and see if it fits your family's needs.
- Find out what the teacher-student ratio is.
- Investigate what kinds of resources are available at the school: language labs, media resources, organized activities or outings.

## See also

- Keywords: language schools

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## Choosing language materials for independent study

### Introduction

Independent study materials vary from terrible to excellent. It is important to find out as much as you can about

- when materials were developed and by whom
- the methodology they use, and
- the scope of the material.

### Guidelines

- Do not use courses based exclusively on grammatical explanations, vocabulary, and translation to and from English or your own language.

**Reason:** They give you no situational context and very little real comprehensible input.

- If you have written materials, and no audio component, you will be unable to develop listening skills and have no model for correct pronunciation.

**Tip:** Using a book by itself may help if you are only interested in developing reading (and perhaps writing) skills.

- Use a phrase book and cassette tapes in combination with other materials. On their own, they are useful only if your ultimate goal is High Novice; enough to get around in a very limited way as a tourist. To go further you have to recognize the meaningful parts of the utterances and recombine them, rather than just memorizing phrases and sentences as wholes.
- Provide an opportunity to work on comprehension and speaking skills.

**Example:** Some cassette and book courses (e.g., *The Learnables*, by Harris Winitz) are designed specifically to give you comprehension skills in a new language.

- Check the dates of full-blown audio-lingual courses.

**Tip:** Some commercial courses are quite dated, having been developed about 20 years ago. Older courses can be useful, but tend to rely on a lot of pattern practice and mimicry.

- Provide a situational context.

**Example:** Some newer computer software programs claim to enable you to get to High Novice level in just a few weeks of full-time study. They are multimedia and interactive, and combine audio, video, and computer technology to give you immediate feedback and situational context. They tend to be quite expensive, but you might be able to find a copy at a university or at a public library.

- Find materials interesting enough to hold your attention and to keep you motivated to use it long enough to make real progress.

**Example:** Some courses based on a continuing story line were developed by the British Broadcasting Company and by Public Broadcasting Stations in the United States. These programs, available on a series of videos, are both entertaining and pedagogically sound.

## See also

- Keywords: independent language study

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## Drawing up guidelines for hiring and working with a tutor

### Introduction



Before you go out to hire a tutor, it is a good idea to have some guidelines in place for yourself, so that you know what kind of tutor you want are are looking for.

## Steps

1. Decide whether it is advisable to hire a man or a woman.

**Note:** Depending on the cultural framework you are learning in, it might be advisable to hire a tutor of the same sex as you.

2. Decide how much time per week you would like to work with the tutor.
3. Decide how much money you are willing to pay per hour or session.
4. Decide whether you want the tutor to follow a particular book or course you have chosen or whether you want the tutor to make up the course of study for you.
5. Decide on the period of time to propose to the tutor for working together.

**Note:** It is best not to commit yourself to a long contract with a tutor until you see how it well you can work together.

## See also

- Keywords: tutors (language)

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## Deciding on strategies for informal language practice

### Introduction

Very few of us spend the entire day in a language school program. But if you are living in a setting where the language you want to learn is being spoken you can take advantage of opportunities to practice informally. In fact, trying to use what you know in real conversation situations is an important part of developing ture proficiency in a second language.

### Things to do

- Look for places where people congregate and talk where you could go and listen or get into a conversation.
- Look for shops or restaurants where you could go and buy something inexpensive, and have a chance to interact with the waiter or salesperson.
- Look for clubs, interest groups, associations, choirs, etc. that you could join.

- Look for speakers of the language you want to learn who want to learn your language and would agree to conversation practice exchange.
- Look for adult education courses in some subject you are interested in or for a person who would be willing to teach you some skill.
- Look for someone interested in learning some skill you have.
- Look for media resources or public libraries (if these exist for the language you are learning) where you can borrow or rent videos and books.

### **See also**

- Keywords: informal language learning

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## **How to design a language and culture learning program**

### **Introduction**

Would you know how to go about designing a program for yourself or another person to learn a second language and culture? This set of modules contains suggestions on what to do.

### **Prerequisites**

Before you design a language and culture learning program you need to know about the audience for whom you are designing the program and other factors about the learning situation .

**See:** How to analyze the situation

### **Steps**

1. Set instructional objectives.

**See:** Setting instructional objectives

2. Decide what kind of language learning syllabus to develop.

**See:** Choosing what kind of language learning syllabus to design

3. Design a language learning syllabus.

**See:** How to design a language learning syllabus

4. Develop a language learning program, based on your syllabus.

- See:** How to develop a language learning program based on your syllabus
5. Make unit plans.  
**See:** How to make a unit plan
  6. Make daily lesson plans.  
**See:** How to make a Daily Language Learning Plan
  7. Prepare your own language learning materials, if needed.  
**See:** How to prepare your own language learning materials

### **See also**

- Keywords: language and culture learning program

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## **Setting instructional objectives**

### **Introduction**

You cannot design language learning lessons for yourself until you know what your instructional objectives are.

### **Things to do**

- Review your long-term goals.  
**See:** How to set your language learning goals
- Determine your current language proficiency.  
**See:** Testing your language proficiency
- Review the instructional objectives listed in Developing oral communication skills and Guidelines for a language and culture learning program for suggestions as to objectives appropriate for each stage of learning in developing both linguistic and pragmatic competence in the four basic language skills.
- Make a list of instructional objectives you want to include in your program.
- If you are having trouble deciding on instructional objectives, do a needs analysis.  
**See:** How to do a needs analysis

### **See also**

- Keywords: objectives (instructional)

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## How to do a needs analysis

### Introduction

Suppose you are sitting down to write objectives for yourself. How do you know where to start? How do you get more specific? You cannot work on everything at the same time. What should your priorities be?

One way to work out your priorities is to do a needs analysis for yourself, in which you analyze your own language learning needs.

### Warning

You may find some items with high ratings on your list that are inappropriate for your current stage of learning. For example, it may be important and urgent to you to be able to persuade someone to adopt a certain course of action, but this is not an appropriate goal to include in a lesson plan for a beginner.

### Worksheet

There is a worksheet available to help you do a needs analysis: [PDF\(3\)](#)

### Steps

1. Think of situations in which you want or need to use the language
  - at home
  - in work situations
  - for pleasure
  - for socializing, or
  - in learning situations.
2. For each situation, list specific things you need to do using the language.
3. Rank each need on your list from one to five according to three criteria:
  - The frequency with which the need arises
  - The urgency of the need
  - Its importance to you personally

4. Add the three ratings to get a total.

**Result:** The items with the highest totals represent what you most want to include in your learning program.

## Sources

This method is adapted from Dickenson, 1987.

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## Choosing what kind of language learning syllabus to design

### Introduction

You need to have an idea of the overall plan of your language learning program before you start to develop it. This overall plan is called a language learning syllabus.

### Prerequisites

Before you decide on a syllabus type you need to have set your language learning goals. It also helps to have discovered your learning style.

### Steps

1. Read about the different types of language learning syllabuses you could choose from.
2. Consider which kind of syllabus best fits your learning style and personality.
3. Consider which type of syllabus best fits your purposes for learning the language.
4. Weighing all these factors, decide on the kind of syllabus to develop for your language learning program.

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## How to design a language learning syllabus

### Introduction

A language learning syllabus consists of a list of the learning objectives for your language learning program and the sequence in which you intend for them to be learned. Writing a syllabus for yourself helps.

### Prerequisites

Before you develop a language learning syllabus you need to choose which kind of

syllabus you want to develop.

## Alternatives

Here are alternative kinds of syllabuses you might choose to design:

A. Design a structural-lexical syllabus.

**See:** How to design a structural-lexical syllabus

B. Design a functional-notional syllabus.

**See:** How to design a functional-notional syllabus

C. Design a situational-topical syllabus.

**See:** How to develop a situational-topical syllabus

D. Design a mixed syllabus.

**See:** How to develop a multi-focus syllabus

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## How to design a structural-lexical syllabus

### Introduction

A structural-lexical syllabus is one where the principle objective is for the learners to acquire the grammatical structures and vocabulary of the language they are learning.

### Benefits

- The learner moves from simpler to more complex structures and may grasp the grammatical system more easily.
- If learners are also doing grammatical analysis, it may fit in well with what they are discovering *about* the language.

### Warning

The potential disadvantage of the structural-lexical syllabus is that it does not address the immediate communication needs of the learner who is learning a language within the context of a community where the language is spoken. In fact, the sociolinguistic aspects of communicative competence are not in focus at all in a strictly structural-lexical syllabus. It is, therefore, more useful in a context where the language learner does not have immediately communication needs.

## Steps

1. Decide on a set of structures to be learned and arrange them in increasing complexity, from simple clauses to complex sentences and discourses.  
**See:** Chapter 4.2 of *Kick-starting your language learning* for a suggestion of a progression of structures and activities that can be used to learn them.
2. Decide on categories of vocabulary to be learned  
**See:** Chapter 4.1 of *Kick-starting your language learning* for suggestions on categories of vocabulary to include in your language learning.  
**Note:** If you are designing a program to learn a language you do not know, obviously you won't know the specific vocabulary words to include here. You will have to elicit or discover them as you do your lessons.
3. Sequence the vocabulary categories, putting what you think will be the more commonly used and more concrete vocabulary earlier, and the more abstract and less-commonly-used later.
4. Fit the sets of structures and vocabulary together into sets of learning objectives, on which to base the units of your syllabus.

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## How to design a functional-notional syllabus

### Introduction

A functional-notional syllabus is based on learning to recognize and express the communicative functions of language and the concepts and ideas it expresses. In other words, this kind of syllabus is based more on the purposes for which language is used and on the meanings the speaker wanted to express than on the forms used to express them.

### Benefits

- The learners learn how to use language to express authentic communicative purposes.
- Learners may be motivated by the opportunity to use language to express their own purposes, ideas, and emotions.

### Warning

Here are some potential disadvantages of the functional-notional syllabus:

- Functions and notions are quite abstract and some learners may have difficulties thinking of communicative functions outside a specific context.

- Different kinds of structures are often used to express the same communicative function, so that it is difficult to follow a progression from simpler to more complex structures.

## Steps

1. Make a list of communication functions you want to include in your syllabus.

**See:** Common purposes or functions of language for suggestions of communicative functions to use.

**See also:** Guidelines for a language and culture learning program for suggestions as to what functions might be appropriate for different stages of learning, and Chapter 4.3 of *Kick-starting your language learning* for Thomson's list of communication functions.

2. Make a list of the semantic notions you want to include in your syllabus.

**Note:** Since notions deal with meaning, and not the specific way that meaning is realized in a given language, it is possible to make a list of general notions that should hold for any language. Specific notions, however, will differ from language to language, because they are based on the cultural framework and the kinds of distinctions people in each culture need to make.

3. Group the functions and notions together into sets of objectives that will form the basis for your units.

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## How to develop a situational-topical syllabus

### Introduction

A situational-topical syllabus is based on the communication situations you need to operate in and the topics you need to discuss. It is similar to a functional-notional syllabus in that it will usually contain communication functions and notions, but in this syllabus the choice of functions and notions depends on the situational or topical context.

### Benefits

- It provides for concrete contexts within which to learn notions, functions, and structures, thus making it easier for most learners to envisage
- It may motivate learners to see that they are learning to meet their most pressing everyday communication needs.



## Warning

The potential disadvantage of the situational-topical syllabus is that functions and notions may be learned in the context of only one situation, whereas they may be expressed in a variety of situations. Also, although some situations have a predictable script, unforeseen things can happen in any situation, requiring a change of script or topic.

## Steps

1. Make a list of the communication situations you want to be able to operate in, and order them from.
2. Make a list of topics you want to be able to discuss, and the associated categories of vocabulary.

**Note:** If you are designing a program to learn a language you do not know, obviously you won't know the specific vocabulary words to include here. You will have to elicit or discover them as you do your lessons.

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## How to develop a multi-focus syllabus

### Introduction

A multi-focus syllabus is one which includes a variety of elements, specifically structures, functions and notions, situations and topics.

### Benefits

- Some of the limitations of the other types of syllabuses are avoided, because there are a variety of elements addressed.
- It can allow for a two-pronged approach, in which one prong emphasizes working systematically on structures and vocabulary to build up general linguistic knowledge, and the other prong concentrates on meeting immediate communicative needs and on building up sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence.

### Warning

Here are some potential disadvantages of the multi-focus syllabus:

- Since there are more elements to weave together into a syllabus, it might take more planning time and "bookkeeping."
- It might be harder to sequence than a structural-lexical syllabus.

## Steps

1. Make a list of structures to be learned and arrange them in increasing complexity, from simple clauses to complex sentences and discourses.  
**See:** Chapter 4.2 of *Kick-starting your language learning* for a suggestion of a progression of structures and activities that can be used to learn them.
2. Make a list of categories of vocabulary to be learned  
**See:** Chapter 4.1 of *Kick-starting your language learning* for suggestions on categories of vocabulary to include in your language learning.  
**Note:** If you are designing a program to learn a language you do not know, obviously you won't know the specific vocabulary words to include here. You will have to elicit or discover them as you do your lessons.
3. Make a list of communication functions you want to include in your syllabus.  
**See:** Common purposes or functions of language for suggestions of communicative functions to use.  
**See also:** Guidelines for a language and culture learning program for suggestions as to what functions might be appropriate for different stages of learning, and Chapter 4.3 of *Kick-starting your language learning* for Thomson's list of communication functions.
4. Make a list of the communication situations you want to be able to operate in, and order them from.
5. Make a list of topics you want to be able to discuss, and the associated categories of vocabulary.
6. Decide how you will combine the various elements of your syllabus into units.

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## How to develop a language learning program based on your syllabus

### Introduction

Once you have designed a syllabus for your language learning program you can develop it by writing specific lesson plans aimed at achieving your instructional objectives. You can organize your daily lesson plans into units of lessons that seem to fit together well. Your lesson plans will include not only your objectives, but also the specific techniques, activities, and materials you will use to achieve your language learning objectives.

## Prerequisites

Before you can develop the details of your language learning program you need to have chosen a syllabus.

**See:** How to design a language learning syllabus

## Steps

1. Make unit plans based on the sets of objectives you have grouped together.

**See:** How to make a unit plan

2. Check that the units are arranged in a sequence from less complex to more complex and from more common to less common.

3. Make daily language learning plans for each unit.

**See:** How to make a Daily Language Learning Plan

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## How to make a unit plan

### Introduction

Once you have set instructional objectives for yourself and decided on a criterion for organizing our program into units (see How to design a language and culture learning program,) the next step is to make unit plans. Your plans should include the following elements:

- Objectives
- Techniques and activities
- Resources
- A projected time frame
- An evaluation criterion

### Steps

1. Review the set of objectives you have decided to base your unit on.
2. Decide on the techniques and activities you will use to meet these objectives.

**See:** Techniques for self-directed language learners

3. List any resources you will need to carry out the techniques and activities.
4. Decide how long it will take to do all the techniques and activities.
5. Decide how you will determine whether or not you have met your objectives.

### See also

When you have made a unit plan, you will want to divide it up into daily plans.

- How to make a Daily Language Learning Plan
- Keywords: unit plans (language learning program)

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## How to make a Daily Language Learning Plan

### Introduction

The Daily Language Lesson Plan is normally part of a set of lessons making up a unit. It therefore has all the same basic parts as a unit plan, but just enough for one day.

### Sample lesson plan

To see a sample of a daily language learning plan click [here](#).

### Worksheet

There is a worksheet available to use when you make daily lesson plans. [PDF\(4\)](#)

### Prerequisite

You need to have identified some learning objectives before you can make your lesson plan.

### Guidelines

- Be as specific as possible and write objectives in such a way that you will know whether or not you have achieved them.

**Example:** If your objective is *learn common vocabulary*, it is too vague. *Be able to name at least 20 common animals* is a specific objective because you can test yourself by naming 20 animals.

- Write out what you intend to do during the lesson in as much detail as possible at first. The tendency is to be too general, which leaves you fumbling around, trying to decide what to do when you implement the plan.

## Steps

1. List the particular objectives you want to achieve in this lesson.
2. List one or more activities or techniques which will help you meet each objective.  
**See:** Techniques for self-directed language learners
3. List the materials you need to do each technique.
4. Allot a certain amount of time to each activity.
5. List evaluation criteria for the lesson

## See also

- Keywords: daily plans (language learning program)

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## How to prepare your own language learning materials

### Introduction

If you are designing your own program or supplementing a program, you may want to prepare some language learning materials to use with a language helper. Here are some suggestions on what you can do.

### Things to do

- Make a picture book plus recordings.  
**See:** How to make a picture book plus recordings
- Make a photo book for language learning.  
**See:** How to make a photo book for language learning
- Make a language learning kit.  
**See:** How to make a language learning kit

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## How to make a picture book plus recordings

### Introduction

This module describes how to make your own picture book plus recordings if one is not

available in the language you are learning.

## Guidelines

- Make your drawings as simple as possible and focus on the chosen topic. Make certain the drawings are suitable (and not offensive) to the culture.
- Use the drawings initially to learn single words, later returning to the same drawings for sentences, finally using the same drawings for collections of sentences that make up a story. Draw your pictures so as to include sentence types listed in Brewster and Brewster 1976:322–349, or mentioned by Thomson in Chapter 4.2 of Kick-starting your language learning.
- Use lots of repetition and review a new word at least five or six times in the next drawings.
- Reintroduce old vocabulary throughout the book.
- Record each session and review it several times before moving on to new material.

## Steps

### *Before your session*

1. Prepare your drawings.

### *During your session*

2. Demonstrate the technique to the language associate (LA) using your common language.
3. Allow the LA time to look at the drawings for a while. Then record the LA's description of the drawings.

### *After your session*

4. Listen to each tape two or three times while looking at the pictures before going on to the next one.

## See also

- Keywords: Picture Book Plus Recordings technique, audio recordings, comprehension, pictures and picture books, resources, vocabulary

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## Example: Make a (market scene) picture book plus recordings

## Steps

Follow these steps to make a market scene picture book plus recordings:

1. You prepare drawings of a market scene, including various activities of vendors hawking wares, selecting produce, bargaining for a price, paying for the produce, wrapping the produce to take home.
2. You use the drawing of a vendor hawking wares to demonstrate to the LA what you want him or her to do.
3. You let the LA study the drawings, and then you record the LA's description of the actions taking place in the drawings, the vendors hawking wares, selecting produce, bargaining for a price, paying for the produce, wrapping the produce to take home.
4. You listen to the tape several times and look at the drawings as you hear the LA describe the market scene happenings.

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## How to make a photo book for language learning

### Introduction

Photos can be a great help in language learning at various stages of learning. They are particularly helpful in the initial stage at providing a visual context to associate with the new words the learner is hearing and trying to remember.

You can set up a photo book to use with various language learning techniques, particularly the Look and Listen techniques. Photo books can be organized in various ways, depending on how you want to use them.

### Guidelines

- Use a nonpermanent means of sticking the photo into the book, so that you can rearrange the photos for various purposes.
- Think about the kinds of vocabulary, topics, and/or structures you want to learn about and include them when taking your pictures or looking for pictures.

### Steps

1. Decide what you want to use your photo book to learn about.
2. Take the photos, or cut out pictures from magazines, advertisements, or other picture sources.

3. Arrange the photos in a way that fits the activity you want to do.

### **See also**

Use of a book of photos in initial comprehension

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## **How to make a language learning kit**

### **Introduction**

A language learning kit is a collection of simple props you can use in initial language learning sessions, particularly to aid in comprehension. You can make your kit as you go along, depending on the kinds of vocabulary and topics you want to learn.

### **Steps**

1. Make a list of the topics you want to learn about in the coming weeks.
  2. For each topic, list the props you could make to help you learn about the topics.
  3. Collect materials such as cardboard, magazines with pictures, construction paper, glue, scissors.
  4. Make the props you think you will need.
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## **Example: How to make a language learning kit**

### **Steps**

Follow these steps to make a language learning kit:

1. You list the following topics you want to learn about in the coming weeks: days of the week, telling time, months of the year, basic colors, numbers from 1–100.
  2. You list the following props you could make to help you learn about the topics: a calendar, a set of cards of different colors, an abacus.
  3. You collect cardboard, brads, markers, construction paper, glue, scissors, and a child's abacus.
  4. You make a clock face, a calendar for this year (with the month names and names for days of the week missing), a set of small cards of different colors.
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## Monitoring the language learning process

### Introduction

When you monitor the language learning process you are both learner and observer of your own learning. Paying attention to what you are doing enables you to see if your learning is effective and if you are progressing toward your goals.

### Things to do

- Keep a language learning journal.

**See:** Keeping a daily language learning journal

- See how the language learning techniques and activities in your program relate to your objectives.
- Use the guidelines for a language and culture learning program to monitor your learning.

**See:** Using guidelines for a language-culture learning program to monitor learning

### See also

As you implement your plan and monitor your learning, you may eventually wish to check your progress. See step 4:

- How to manage your language learning program
- Keywords: progress (language learning)

---

## Keeping a daily language learning journal

### Introduction

One of the most valuable things you can do in your language learning program is to keep a journal. Some of you have never kept a journal and do not want to start now. It is up to you, but why not give it a try?

### Benefits

- It serves as a record of your first impressions of the country and culture. As you go around the community you will be seeing it with fresh eyes. Later on, everything will

become familiar and you will not even notice some things. It is both interesting and valuable to record what you saw and felt when you were just becoming acquainted with the language and culture.

- You keep track of what you do every day as you use the language in *both* structured and unstructured settings. This is helpful when you evaluate your program and see what changes you should make, if any.
- You record how you *feel* about what you do every day. The whole area of feelings is very important to language learning success. You might find it helpful to check your attitudes by taking the Attitudes questionnaire. Writing your negative emotions can help you determine what is causing them and can help you resolve the problems. Writing positive emotions can encourage you and keep you going.

### Things to do

- If you are using a notebook, number the pages and date every entry.
- If you are using a word processing program on your computer, set up the document so that you number and date every entry.
- In your journal record what you do every day, both in formal and informal settings. Put in as much detail as you can.
- Write how you feel about what is happening, especially noting particularly positive or negative emotions.

### See also

- Keywords: attitudes, journaling, progress (language learning)

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## Using guidelines for a language-culture learning program to monitor learning

### Introduction

The Guidelines for a language and culture learning program list objectives for each area of communicative competence. They also list strategies, techniques, and activities you can use to help meet those objectives. The guidelines are particularly aimed at people who have to design their own lessons.

You can also use the guidelines to monitor how your daily activities and lessons contribute toward meeting your objectives.

## Things to do

- Write down the techniques and activities you are using in your language learning program (either in language school classes or independent learning).
- For each technique or activity, write down the objective(s) you think it is meant to help you achieve.
- Look at the Guidelines for the stage of learning you think you are currently in and list the objectives you think are important, but which do not seem to be covered by your current program.

**Tip:** Most language school programs will expose you to the basic sounds, grammatical structures, and vocabulary of the language. They may be short on chances to use language in natural settings. For this reason the section of the guidelines on functions may be particularly helpful to you.

- Write down techniques or activities you could use to meet the objectives you have listed.

## See also

- Keywords: communicative competence, culture learning, guidelines, objectives (instructional), progress (language learning)

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## Checking your progress

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you check your progress:

- Monitor the objectives and content covered in formal lessons, and rate how well you met the objectives.

**Tip:** You can use the Self-Assessment Questionnaire to help. [PDF\(5\)](#)

- Familiarize yourself with the ACTFL Proficiency guidelines. Use them to make a global evaluation of your proficiency in any of the language skills at a given time.
- Assess your current proficiency level in each of the four basic language skills at regular intervals. Use Checklists based on the proficiency guidelines.
- Assess your current proficiency level by setting up tests for yourself, based on how well you can perform certain language tasks.

**See:** Testing your language proficiency

- Record your proficiency in each skill and plot your progress across time.

## Worksheets

There is a worksheet available to help you assess how well you are meeting the objectives in your formal lessons. The worksheet includes the following things for you to do:

- Keep track of the objectives for each lesson.
- Rate yourself on how well you think you have met the objectives.
- Judge your weak points.
- Discuss your assessment of yourself with a fellow learner, teacher, or consultant.

Click on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire button above to see the worksheet now.

## See also

To evaluate your rate of progress, see:

- **OVERVIEW:** Project rate of language learning progress
- **Keywords:** evaluating proficiency, progress (language learning), self-assessment, worksheets

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## Testing your language proficiency

### Introduction

You can set up tests for yourself to help you gauge your language proficiency more realistically. You can also ask a consultant or fellow-learner to set up such a test for you. You can base these tests on the kinds of tasks a learner can typically perform at a given level according to the ACTFL guidelines.

### Guidelines

- Decide on the skill you want to test yourself in: listening, speaking, reading, or writing.
- Look at the list of tasks representative of that level under What you can do at different proficiency levels.
- Choose a task representative of a level that might describe you.

**Example:** If you have been Intermediate for awhile and think you might have reached Advanced, choose a task under Advanced.

- Do not just ask yourself if you can perform the language task; actually do the work.
- Do not rehearse the specific task ahead of time.

**Reason:** In that way your performance will more accurately reflect your actual overall ability.

- Record yourself doing each speaking task, and listen to the tape later.
- After you do the task, read the ACTFL guidelines descriptions of the skill you are testing.
- Decide which level describes you most accurately.

### Things to do

- Test your listening proficiency.  
**See:** Testing your listening proficiency
- Test your speaking proficiency.  
**See:** Testing your speaking proficiency
- Test your reading proficiency.  
**See:** Testing your reading proficiency
- Test your writing proficiency.  
**See:** Testing your writing proficiency

### See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, evaluating proficiency

---

## Testing your listening proficiency

### Introduction

You can test your listening proficiency by choosing a comprehension task to perform and comparing your performance to the descriptions of different listening proficiency levels in the ACTFL guidelines.

### Guidelines

- Choose a task that is appropriate for what you think is your current proficiency level,

- or ask someone else to choose the task.
- Do not rehearse the specific task ahead of time.
- Reason:** The point is to see if you can perform a task that represents your overall proficiency, not to memorize something.

### Things to do

- Choose a listening task representative of the level you think you have reached. Even better, ask a friend to choose a task for you so you will not choose something you know that you can do.
- Listen and demonstrate your understanding of what you heard to a language associate.
- Ask the language associate what parts you misunderstood.
- Reread the description of the different levels of listening proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

### Examples

Here are examples of how to test your listening proficiency:

- Example: Using comparisons and contrasts to test your listening proficiency
- Example: Using television or radio to test your listening proficiency
- Example: Using a map to test your listening proficiency

### See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, evaluating proficiency, listening proficiency

---

## Example: Using comparisons and contrasts to test your listening proficiency

### Introduction

One way to test your listening proficiency is to ask someone to compare and contrast two objects or persons, while you note the important points of similarity or difference.

## Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you use comparisons and contrasts to test your listening proficiency:

- Use this technique if you think you might be Advanced Proficiency.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use comparisons and contrasts to test your listening proficiency:

- You think you might be at Advanced level so you ask a speaker of the language to choose two things or people to compare or contrast.
- Listen and note the important points of similarity or difference.
- Tell the speaker later what you thought were the main points of comparison or contrast, and see if he or she agrees.
- Reread the description of the different levels of listening proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which guideline level matches your performance.

---

## Example: Using television or radio to test your listening proficiency

### Introduction

You can use television or radio to test your overall level of proficiency in the target language. This is a good technique if resources are available, since the news broadcast is different every day and you cannot rehearse in advance.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use television or radio to test your listening proficiency:

- Watch a television or listen to a radio news broadcast. Audio tape or videotape the broadcast if that is an option.
- After the broadcast, note the main stories, and describe them in detail to someone who understands the language well.

**Note:** You can use either the target language or your own to describe what you heard. This is a test of listening comprehension, not of speaking or writing.

- Ask the person to tell you if you got something wrong.
- Go back and read the description of the different levels of listening proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

**Note:** If you can only understand people talking about events you already knew about, you are not at Advanced level.

If you can understand most of the international news, you probably are at Advanced level, even if you cannot understand all the national or local news.

If you understand almost everything, you are probably Superior level.

### See also

- Keywords: media, radio, television

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## Example: Using a map to test your listening proficiency

### Introduction

You can use two copies of a town or city map to test your listening proficiency.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use a map to test your listening proficiency:

- Use this technique if you think you are at Intermediate proficiency.
- You can use this technique to learn to understand directions as well as to check proficiency.

**Tip:** When testing yourself, ask

- a speaker other than a language associate (LA) to test you, or
- the LA to direct you to a place you have not already used in practice activities.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use a town or city map to test your listening proficiency:

- You choose understanding directions as a task appropriate to Intermediate level. Give



a speaker of the language one copy of a town or city map and ask for directions on how to get from one place to another.

- Listen to the directions and trace the path on your copy of the map.
- Check with the speaker to see if you arrived at the right place.
- Reread the description of the different levels of listening proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

**Note:** If you got where you were supposed to most of the time, you are probably at Intermediate level.

### See also

- Keywords: directions

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## Testing your speaking proficiency

### Introduction

You can test your speaking proficiency by choosing a speaking task to perform, recording yourself, and listening to your performance later. You can compare your performance to the descriptions of different speaking proficiency levels in the ACTFL guidelines.

### Guidelines

- Choose a task appropriate for the proficiency level you think describes you, or ask someone else to choose the task.
- Do not rehearse the specific task ahead of time.

**Reason:** The point is to see if you can perform a task that represents your overall proficiency, not to memorize a speech.

### Things to do

- Choose a speaking task representative of what you think is your current level. Even better, ask a friend to choose a task for you so you will not choose something you know you can do.
- Record yourself doing the task.
- Reread the description of the different levels of speaking proficiency in the ACTFL

guidelines.

- Listen to the tape and decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

## Examples

Here are examples of how to test your speaking proficiency:

- Example: Using a wordless book to test your speaking proficiency
- Example: Giving directions to test your speaking proficiency
- Example: Describing a process to test your speaking proficiency

## See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, evaluating proficiency, speaking proficiency

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## Example: Using a wordless book to test your speaking proficiency

### Introduction

You can test your speaking proficiency by telling a story from a picture book where almost all of the events are depicted, but which has no words.

**Tip:** These books can sometimes be acquired in children's bookstores.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you test your speaking proficiency using a wordless book:

- Use this technique when you think you are at Intermediate level or above.
- You can use the same book more than once, but do not look at it between tests.
- Use a book that fits the culture of the language you are learning.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do to when you use a wordless book to test your speaking proficiency.

- You decide to do storytelling and choose or make a storybook with pictures but no words.

- Record your version of the story as you look at the pages with a language associate.
- Listen to the recording, then reread the description of the different levels of speaking proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

### See also

- Keywords: pictures and picture books

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## Example: Giving directions to test your speaking proficiency

### Introduction

You can test your speaking proficiency by directing someone to a place familiar to you.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you give directions to test your speaking proficiency:

- Use this task if you think you are at Intermediate level.
- Ask the language associate to choose the place for which you are giving directions.

**Reason:** If you are not able to rehearse, your performance is more likely to reflect your actual proficiency.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do to test your speaking proficiency by giving directions:

- Ask a language associate (LA) to choose a place to which he or she wants you to give directions.
- Record yourself giving the directions. Ask the LA to follow along on a map or to draw a diagram, indicating what you have said.
- Listen to the recording, then read the description of the different levels of speaking proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

## See also

- Keywords: directions

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## Example: Describing a process to test your speaking proficiency

### Introduction

You can test your speaking proficiency by telling someone how to do a task familiar to you.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you describe a process to test your speaking proficiency:

- Use this task when you think you are at Intermediate level or higher.
- You can use the same procedure more than once, but do not practice in between testing.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you describe a process to test your speaking proficiency:

- Choose a process to talk about that you have not rehearsed or memorized.
- Record yourself telling someone how to do this procedure.
- Go back and read the description of the different levels of speaking proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Listen to the recording, and decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

## See also

- Keywords: Series method

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## Testing your reading proficiency

### Introduction

You can test your reading proficiency by choosing a reading task to perform and then

comparing your performance to the descriptions of different reading proficiency levels in the ACTFL guidelines.

### **Guidelines**

- Choose a task appropriate for the proficiency level you think describes you, or ask someone else to choose the task.
- Do not rehearse the specific task ahead of time.

**Reason:** The point is to see if you can perform a task that represents your overall proficiency.

### **Things to do**

- Choose a reading task representative of the level you think you are at. Even better, ask a friend to choose a task for you so you will not choose something you know you can do.
- Read the passage and do something that shows you understand what you have read.
- Reread the description of the different levels of reading proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

### **Example**

Here is an example of how to test your reading proficiency:

- Example: Using a newspaper to test your reading proficiency

### **See also**

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, evaluating proficiency, reading proficiency

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## **Example: Using a newspaper to test your reading proficiency**

### **Introduction**

You can use a local newspaper to test your reading proficiency.

### **Things to do**

Here are the things to do when you use a newspaper to test your reading proficiency:

- Get a copy of a current newspaper. Look through it and read as much as you can.
- Ask someone who reads the language well to read the same edition of the newspaper, and discuss the contents with that person.
- Read the description of the different levels of reading proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.
  - If you can understand only a few words here and there, you are probably at Novice level.
  - If you can only understand the headlines, you are probably at Intermediate level.
  - If you can understand most straightforward news stories that do not require a lot of specific cultural knowledge, you are probably at Advanced level.
  - If you can understand stories, editorials, and political commentaries that do require specific cultural knowledge, you are probably at Superior level.
  - If you can read the entire newspaper almost as easily as you could in your first language, you have achieved Distinguished level.

### See also

- Keywords: newspaper

---

## Testing your writing proficiency

### Introduction

You can test your writing proficiency by choosing a writing task to perform and then comparing your performance to the descriptions of different writing proficiency levels in the ACTFL guidelines.

### Guidelines

- Choose a task that is appropriate for the proficiency level you think describes you, or ask someone else to choose the task.
- Do not rehearse the specific task ahead of time.

**Reason:** The point is to see if you can perform a task that represents your overall proficiency.

## Things to do

- Choose a writing task representative of the level you think you are at. Even better, ask a friend to choose a task for you so you will not choose something you know you can do.
- Show what you have written to someone who reads and writes the language well and ask for corrections.

**See:** The Write and Rewrite technique

- Reread the description of the different levels of writing proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

## Example

Here is an example of how to test your writing proficiency:

- Example: Writing descriptions and summaries to test your writing proficiency

## See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, descriptions, evaluating proficiency, writing proficiency

---

## Example: Writing descriptions and summaries to test your writing proficiency

### Introduction

If you think you are at Intermediate proficiency, you can test your writing ability by describing a place you have visited, or writing a short summary of something you have heard or read.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you write descriptions and summaries to test your writing proficiency:

- Decide what to write about. Choose something you have not written about before.
- When you have finished, show your writing to someone who reads and writes the

language well, and ask for corrections.

- Reread the description of the different levels of writing proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.
  - If you are able to write a description or summary that a mother tongue speaker can understand, you are probably at Intermediate level. You may have to look up some words in the dictionary and may still make quite a few mistakes.
  - If you are able to write a description or summary fairly easily, you may be at Advanced level. You may have to look up just a few words in the dictionary and may make just a few mistakes.
  - If you are able to write a description or summary easily without using a dictionary and making almost no mistakes, you may be at Superior level.

### **See also**

- Keywords: descriptions

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## **How to identify and solve your language learning problems**

### **Introduction**

If you are not making the progress you would like to make or are not satisfied with your language learning program, you can get help in identifying the problems or obstacles facing you and in trying to solve them.

### **Introduction**

You may be frustrated, or feel you are not making the rate of progress you would like in your language learning. If so, you can try to identify your problems and do something about them. There are resources in the Language Learning Workshop that can help.

### **Things to do**

- Consult the Language Learning Troubleshooter.
- Review your language learning journal.

### **See also**

- Keywords: troubleshooting language learning



## Guidelines for setting proficiency goals

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### Introduction

What do you mean when you say you want to learn a new language? What do you want to be able to do in the language? Maybe you just want to be able to buy things in a shop or ask directions. Maybe you want to feel comfortable living in a country and making friends. Or will you need to use the language to communicate subtle distinctions in your work as well as in your everyday life?

The answers to these questions will help determine your language learning goals. The more specific you can be about your goals, the better you will know whether or not you have met them.

To help you decide on your goals, there are discussions of the levels of proficiency in each language skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). These guidelines use a five-level proficiency scale to represent the major divisions of the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages Guidelines, the ACTFL guidelines and the corresponding levels of the Interagency Language Roundtable scale (Foreign Services Institute), the ILR (FSI) scale. To set goals, the five major divisions give a sufficient fine-grain scale. For evaluation, the subdivisions of each level are helpful.

### In this module group

Here are the modules on guidelines for setting proficiency goals:

- OVERVIEW: Guidelines for setting listening goals
- OVERVIEW: Guidelines for setting speaking goals
- OVERVIEW: Guidelines for setting reading goals
- OVERVIEW: Guidelines for setting writing goals

### See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, ILR proficiency scale, goals (proficiency), language skills (4 basic)

## Guidelines for setting listening goals

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### Introduction

You can read discussions of the different levels of listening ability to help you decide which level you should reach. Bear in mind that your listening proficiency should normally be at least the same as your speaking proficiency, if not higher. When you ask for directions, for instance, you need to understand the answer.

At the end of each module, you will find a reference to another module listing the kinds of things you will understand at that level.

### In this module group

Here are the modules on guidelines for setting listening goals:

- Novice (L 0): Prefunctional Proficiency listening
- Intermediate (L 1): Survival Proficiency listening
- Advanced (L 2): Limited Working Proficiency listening
- Superior (L 3): Professional Proficiency listening
- Distinguished (L 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency listening

### See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, goals (proficiency), listening proficiency

---

## Novice (L 0): Prefunctional Proficiency listening

### Discussion

This is the level you will go through on your way to a truly useful proficiency in a language. At this level you will build up the ability to recognize vocabulary words in isolation or in simple sentences. You will probably need a lot of repetition. You will also have trouble understanding enough to cope with real communication situations in communities where the language is spoken.

### See also

- What you can understand people say at Novice level
- Keywords: listening proficiency

---

## **Intermediate (L 1): Survival Proficiency listening**

### **Discussion**

This is the minimum level you will need to survive on your own in a country where your new language is spoken. At this level you can deal with a limited number of survival situations in your immediate surroundings and where there is a lot of context or shared knowledge.

### **See also**

- What you can understand people say at Intermediate level
- Keywords: listening proficiency

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## **Advanced (L 2): Limited Working Proficiency listening**

### **Discussion**

If you want to study, work, or live in a country for any length of time, you will need this level of proficiency. In a limited way, you can

- understand most face-to-face conversations as a participant
- get along pretty well socially, and
- understand basic information relating to your work.

### **See also**

- What you can understand people say at Advanced level
- Keywords: listening proficiency

---

## **Superior (L 3): Professional Proficiency listening**

### **Discussion**

The superior level learner can function at a full professional level in another language and understand what is happening in situations where people do not come out directly and say what they mean. You will have to spend some time in a country where the language

is spoken before your understanding reaches this level. You will have to experience language use in a variety of real communication situations.

### **See also**

- What you can understand people say at Superior level
- Keywords: listening proficiency

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## **Distinguished (L 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency listening**

### **Discussion**

If you want to understand your new language almost as well as your own, you will have to get to this level. It will probably take years to attain this proficiency. At this level you can understand

- all forms and styles of speech, including
  - plays
  - films
  - academic and professional meetings
  - debates
  - jokes and puns, and
- the nuances of meaning and the background knowledge that native speakers bring to listening situations.

### **See also**

- What you can understand people say at Distinguished level
- Keywords: listening proficiency

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#### OVERVIEW

## **Guidelines for setting speaking goals**

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### **Introduction**

Read the discussions of each level of speaking proficiency to help you decide which level

will meet your needs. At the end of each module, you will find a reference to another module listing the things you would be able to say at that level.

### **In this module group**

Here are the modules on guidelines for setting speaking goals:

- Novice (S 0): Prefunctional Proficiency speaking
- Intermediate (S 1): Survival Proficiency speaking
- Advanced (S 2): Limited Working Proficiency speaking
- Superior (S 3): Professional Proficiency speaking
- Distinguished (S 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency speaking

### **See also**

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, goals (proficiency), speaking proficiency

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## **Novice (S 0): Prefunctional Proficiency speaking**

### **Discussion**

You have to start somewhere and this is the level you will have to pass through to being able to really communicate in the language. Unless you have just a few weeks to get ready to go and will be in a country for just a week or two, you should not make this level your goal. You will have a hard time even being on your own as a tourist at this level of proficiency.

On the other hand, this is a very valuable and necessary stage in your learning. Here you lay the foundation for the higher stages of proficiency by building vocabulary and familiarizing yourself with the most basic structures of the language. In real communication situations, you may become frustrated. You will have only isolated words or a few memorized sentences to get you through every day survival situations. You probably will not be able to put many words together to make new utterances that people can understand.

### **See also**

- What you can say at Novice level
- Keywords: speaking proficiency

---

## **Intermediate (S 1): Survival Proficiency speaking**

### **Discussion**

This is the minimum level if you are going to use the language on a regular basis. If you plan regular visits to a country or area where a language is spoken, you need to use the language mostly to get around, to ask directions, to shop, and to get basic food and services, this level will probably do. At this level you would probably feel pretty comfortable as a tourist. You will speak hesitantly at times, will get some grammatical constructions mixed up, or will find yourself wanting to say things you do not know how to say.

If you want to make significant relationships with speakers of the language or need to use the language regularly in your work, you should aim higher. You probably cannot keep up a conversation with a native speaker for very long, especially on a complicated or abstract topic. People who are not used to foreigners might find you hard to understand.

### **See also**

- What you can say at Intermediate level
- Keywords: speaking proficiency

---

## **Advanced (S 2): Limited Working Proficiency speaking**

### **Discussion**

This is the first stage where you will feel comfortable living, working, or studying in a country where the target language is spoken. It will allow you to meet people, to socialize with them, and to take care of your basic job requirements, although in a limited way.

People will understand you without much difficulty and you will be able to deal with most face-to-face conversations on concrete topics with slight complications. You will probably be understood by people not used to dealing with foreigners, although they (and you) might find communication tiring after some time. You would still grope for words at times. Usually, this is the highest level you can expect to attain without spending time living in a community where the language is spoken.

### **See also**

- What you can say at Advanced level
- Keywords: speaking proficiency

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## **Superior (S 3): Professional Proficiency speaking**

### **Discussion**

You should aim for this level if you

- plan to live for some years in a country
- need the language to carry out fully your job responsibilities
- have a very strong interest in the language
- are interested in the country where the language is spoken, and
- want to make close relationships with people who speak the language.

If you get there, you will speak fluently and rarely make grammatical mistakes that bother native speakers. You may still have to search for a word occasionally, but will be able to come up with another way to say what you want. You will be able to talk about a full range of topics and deal with people on a professional level.

You can expect to spend months or even years in the language community before you reach this level, as it involves sociolinguistic competence. This proficiency can only be developed by experiencing language in a large number of social situations.

### **See also**

- What you can say at Superior level
- Keywords: speaking proficiency

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## **Distinguished (S 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency speaking**

### **Discussion**

If you want to speak the language almost like a mother-tongue speaker, you will

- need many years in the speech community, and
- have to work at learning after you can communicate the basics.

Very few people achieve this goal unless they emigrate to another country relatively early in life, but it is possible and is a worthy goal. You need this proficiency if your job requires

- diplomacy
- the ability to express sophisticated nuances of meaning, and
- the ability to hint at things not directly expressed.

### **See also**

- What you can say at Distinguished level
- Keywords: speaking proficiency

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#### OVERVIEW

## **Guidelines for setting reading goals**

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### **Introduction**

Read the discussions of each level of reading proficiency to help you decide which level will meet your needs. At the end of each module you will find a reference to another module listing the things you will be able to read at that level.

The discussions refer primarily to languages with literary traditions, used by a highly literate society. If you are learning an unwritten or newly-written language, you will be in a very different situation. You will have a different set of goals for reading, which are discussed under a separate submodule.

### **In this module group**

Here are the modules on guidelines for setting reading goals:

- Novice (R 0): Prefunctional Proficiency reading
- Intermediate (R 1): Survival Proficiency reading
- Advanced (R 2): Limited Working Proficiency reading
- Superior (R 3): Professional Proficiency reading
- Distinguished (R 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency reading

### **See also**



- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, goals (proficiency), reading proficiency

---

## **Novice (R 0): Prefunctional Proficiency reading**

### **Discussion**

If all you need to read are signs and menu items on a trip to another country, you can probably function at this level. If you study a language that uses the same writing system as your own or a system you know, you can probably learn in a fairly short time.

### **Unwritten languages**

Your reading and writing goals will probably mirror your listening goals in this situation. Aim to write the words you learn in the International Phonetic Alphabet and to read them afterward. If you study a language with a recognized orthography, you will want to use the script as soon as possible.

### **See also**

- What you can read at Novice level
- Keywords: reading proficiency

---

## **Intermediate (R 1): Survival Proficiency reading**

### **Discussion**

This is the level to aim for if you want to read material with common words and simple grammatical constructions. You may get only the main ideas, unless you rely a lot on the dictionary. You will probably have to reread a lot. If you need to read the language in order to do your work, you will need to aim higher than this level.

Languages like Chinese or Japanese with writing systems of many elements take a lot longer to learn to read than to understand and speak. If you study a language related to your own, you may get to this level quickly. You might get some main ideas from texts at the next higher level, especially if the topic is familiar.

### **Newly-written languages**

If you have a working orthography in the language and can teach a speaker to read and write, you can expand your own reading goals a lot. You will not be the only one doing the writing. As you learn, ask a language associate to record and transcribe some simple

texts for you.

#### *Intermediate level texts*

- Simple, connected texts about predictable subjects
- Short, straightforward descriptions of persons, places, and things for a wide audience
- Basic written directions
- Written descriptions of what a place or a person looks like

#### **See also**

- What you can read at Intermediate level
- Keywords: reading proficiency

---

## **Advanced (R 2): Limited Working Proficiency reading**

### **Discussion**

This level is the minimum you will need if your job requires some reading ability in the new language. At this level, you should understand at least the main ideas and some of the details in clearly presented prose material. These can be several paragraphs which use familiar sentence patterns and a lot of basic vocabulary. More abstract topics and complicated grammatical structures may be beyond you.

### **Newly-written languages**

As your listening comprehension advances, you will understand and write longer and more authentic texts. Try to collect oral literature, accounts of the history of the people, and descriptions of how they perform complicated procedures. If you are involved in a literacy program and are encouraging new authors to write, you will need to read and understand their stories.

#### **See also**

- What you can read at Advanced level
- Keywords: reading proficiency

---

## **Superior (R 3): Professional Proficiency reading**

## Discussion

At this level you can read at nearly normal speed. You can understand almost everything in most texts intended for educated, mother tongue speakers of the language. You will rarely consult a dictionary. If you do, it is to find definitions in the target language. You will have to know a lot about the target language culture to understand some of the texts at this level.

## Newly-written languages

You need to be at this level to check materials translated from other languages for accuracy and naturalness. You will need a control of grammar, vocabulary, and culture. In addition, you will have to spend quite a while in a culture to be able to read and understand some traditional texts.

## See also

- What you can read at Superior level
- Keywords: reading proficiency

---

## Distinguished (R 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency reading

### Discussion

At this level, you will read anything published for the mother tongue speaker audience without using a dictionary. You will understand all styles and forms of the language, including texts that are intellectually challenging. It will take years of living in the culture, but you will be able to

- follow unpredictable turns of thought
- understand aesthetic nuances
- understand cultural and literary allusions and associations, and
- appreciate humor and irony in what you read.

## Newly-written languages

At this level you will understand anything mother tongue authors write in the language, including all cultural and historical allusions. Your reading ability will probably be more characterized by cultural knowledge than linguistic knowledge.

## See also

- What you can read at Distinguished level
- Keywords: reading proficiency

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## OVERVIEW

# Guidelines for setting writing goals

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## Introduction

People learning a second language usually have more limited writing goals than they do for the other three skills. Achieving these goals can still be important. Read the following descriptions and decide what level will meet your writing needs in the target language.

## In this module group

Here are the modules on guidelines for setting writing goals:

- Novice (W 0): Prefunctional Proficiency writing
- Intermediate (W 1): Survival Proficiency writing
- Advanced (W 2): Limited Working Proficiency writing
- Superior (W 3): Professional Proficiency writing
- Distinguished (W 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency writing

## See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, goals (proficiency), writing proficiency

---

## Novice (W 0): Prefunctional Proficiency writing

### Discussion

At this level you are mostly practicing the writing system, rather than using it for functional purposes.

### Unwritten languages

Your reading and writing goals will probably mirror your listening goals in this situation. Aim to write in the International Phonetic Alphabet the words you are learning and to

read them afterward.

### **See also**

- What you can write at Novice level
- Keywords: writing proficiency

---

## **Intermediate (W 1): Survival Proficiency writing**

### **Discussion**

At this level, you can meet limited practical writing needs by recombining vocabulary and structures you have learned into simple sentences. You are likely to make a lot of spelling and grammatical mistakes.

### **Newly-written languages**

As you continue to learn words and structures in the language you will probably want to be able to represent them in a practical orthography, to help you remember them and to aid in your learning.

### **See also**

- What you can write at Intermediate level
- Keywords: writing proficiency

---

## **Advanced (W 2): Limited Working Proficiency writing**

### **Discussion**

At this level, you should be able to meet most practical writing needs in work or study situations in another country. You can use a fairly good range of vocabulary and structures. You will still make some grammatical errors at this stage, and words will not be idiomatic.

### **Newly-written languages**

If you are involved in a literacy program mother tongue authors are developing, you want to encourage them to do most of the writing. In some instances, you might have to write first drafts of texts and check them with mother tongue speakers for accuracy. A written style will begin to emerge in time, so any materials you first publish will probably have to

be revised periodically.

### **See also**

- What you can write at Advanced level
- Keywords: writing proficiency

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## **Superior (W 3): Professional Proficiency writing**

### **Discussion**

This is the level you need to write for professional purposes. Your writing will show good control of a full range of grammatical structures and vocabulary that will enable you to state and support your opinions. You still need to have a mother tongue speaker check your writing for errors and style if it is important to have everything just right. In general, any errors you make should not bother mother tongue speakers or cause miscommunication.

### **Newly-written languages**

If there are no mother tongue language authors, you might have to write drafts of materials for publication. It is still important to check these materials with mother tongue speakers for accurate grammar and vocabulary. This is the level you need if you are in a situation where you need to draft translated materials.

### **See also**

- What you can write at Superior level
- Keywords: writing proficiency

---

## **Distinguished (W 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency writing**

### **Discussion**

To write like a well-educated mother tongue speaker, and to publish material that is linguistically and intellectually complex, you have to attain this level. Good luck! Most people do not reach this level, even in their mother tongue!

### **Newly-written languages**

It is probably unrealistic to talk about a distinguished level of writing proficiency (as

distinct from superior) in a newly-written language. Mother tongue authors have not had time to develop specific written genres.

## See also

- What you can write at Distinguished level
- Keywords: writing proficiency

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## OVERVIEW

# Information to help you make a strategic plan

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## Introduction

Here are some of the concepts and other information that you need to understand to help you make a strategic plan for language learning.

**See also:** Making a strategic plan for language learning

## In this module group

Here are the modules on information to help you make a strategic plan:

- Conditions for language learning
- The best of both settings
- From goals to objectives
- How long will it take to reach my goals?
- What is a language learning plan?
- What is a Language Learning Program Plan?
- What is a Language Learning Unit Plan?
- What is a Daily Language Learning Plan?
- Sample of daily language learning plan -- novice level
- OVERVIEW: Structured language study options
- Learning in an unstructured setting
- What is an approach to language learning?

- What is a language learning program?
- What is a language learning resource?

### See also

- Keywords: planning

---

## Conditions for language learning

### Introduction

The conditions necessary or helpful for second language acquisition depend on your goals and your beliefs. Though theories differ, most experts would agree on certain conditions.

### Conditions

*All* learners need the following conditions to reach Superior proficiency or greater in a second language:

- Lots of comprehensible input
- A chance to observe and participate in language use in a wide range of communication situations where common functions of language are expressed
- A chance to understand the values and presuppositions of the speech community and to absorb the way people think and the knowledge they share
- An opportunity to engage in meaningful communication and negotiation of meaning with mother tongue or fluent speakers of the language

Many learners find the following conditions helpful or necessary:

- Accountability
- Conscious focus on rules of interaction and conversation
- Interpersonal support and encouragement
- Making a plan and consciously monitoring progress
- Memorized survival expressions at the beginning
- Some conscious focus on structure, and application of knowledge of rules

Look at the characteristics of learning a language in both formal and informal settings, including the special considerations of using a tutor, and see how they compare with these



lists of conditions.

## Source

Gregory Thomson

## See also

- Keywords: principles of language learning, second language acquisition theory

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## The best of both settings

### Introduction

### Options

Combine structured and unstructured learning with formal study before you go to the country or area where the language is spoken. Plan to attend language school in a country where the language is spoken.

It is possible to get to High Novice level by using computer-assisted language learning programs, self-study programs, or formal language classes. This may be particularly helpful if the target language is unrelated to other languages you already know. One reason to do this is that it tends to ease the stress of adjusting to a new culture. If you can communicate from the start, it helps you get around in a new country.

Another factor to consider is that it is often cheaper to start language study at home than living and paying tuition in another country. You might be able to find speakers of the language in the community where you live. They may be willing to give you conversation practice or to exchange practice in English for practice in their language.

When you get to your new language community, you may continue part-time formal classes, or spend a lot of time in informal interaction. It will depend on your ultimate goals, the availability and quality of language school programs, and other responsibilities you have.

Even if you develop your own program, you need both structured and unstructured time. You need structured time when you work with a language resource person to explore new areas of the language systematically. You need unstructured time to experience and use the language in communication situations.

## See also

- Keywords: computer-assisted language learning , formal language learning, informal

## From goals to objectives

### Introduction

So far, you have decided on your long-term language learning goals and on a general strategy for getting there. Now you need a more detailed plan, including specific objectives.

### Definition

An objective is a specific statement of the outcome you aim for in a learning activity. You want to state your objectives in a measurable way, so that you can evaluate whether you have met them.

Isn't setting objectives the job of the teacher or language curriculum designer? In a way it is. Anyone who designs a language course or a set of language learning materials has some objectives in mind for the learner. Teachers and tutors also have objectives in mind. But are the teacher's or course designer's objectives the same as yours? Being an independent language learner means that *you* have taken responsibility for your learning. You need to set objectives for yourself and make sure that you meet them.

### Kinds

*What kinds of objectives can you set for yourself?* Here are different areas of communicative competence:

#### **Linguistic competence**

The ability to control the phonology, grammar, and vocabulary of the target language.

#### **Discourse competence**

The ability to construct and interpret connected speech in various genres of discourse.

#### **Sociolinguistic competence**

The ability

- to use language to perform various communication functions
- to recognize the social meaning of different varieties of speech and use them appropriately, and
- to follow the rules of conversational interaction.

## **Cultural competence**

The ability

- to interpret what is said according to the cultural frame of reference of the speech community, and
- to communicate your own ideas within that frame of reference.

## **Strategic competence**

The ability

- to use communication strategies to compensate for lacks in your communicative repertoire, or
- to repair misunderstandings arising from any source.

## **Procedure**

You need to set objectives in each area of communicative competence. The objectives should fit your current stage of proficiency, and your needs and long-term goals.

At the beginning, your objectives will probably be the same as those of most other people learning language. All language learners need to master

- the sounds
- the grammatical structures
- the core vocabulary
- survival situations, and
- basic courtesy functions.

As you progress through Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior levels, your objectives will differ from other students. Objectives depend on the tasks you need to do using the language:

- The topics you want to discuss
- The situations you encounter
- The communication functions you want to express

At these levels you start to specialize and decide what you want to learn first.

Once you have achieved Superior level and are working toward Distinguished level, your objectives will become more like those of other language learners. You work toward

being able to understand everything.

### **See also**

- Setting instructional objectives
- Keywords: communicative competence, goals (proficiency), objectives (instructional), planning

---

## **How long will it take to reach my goals?**

### **Introduction**

The time it takes to reach your goals depends on a number of factors:

- How closely related the target language is to your first language or other languages you know
- The areas of complexity in the language
- How many hours a week you devote exclusively to language learning
- The number and quality of language learning resources available
- The motivation you have

### **Estimating a time frame**

The Language Learning Troubleshooter contains a tool that helps you estimate how long it might take to achieve different levels of proficiency, given favorable conditions. You may go there now.

### **See also**

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), progress (language learning)

---

## **What is a language learning plan?**

### **Definition**

A language learning plan is a course of action the language learner chooses to achieve language learning goals. A plan may be more or less detailed, ranging from a top-level strategic plan to a low-level daily lesson plan.

## Kinds

Here are three kinds of language learning plans used in the Language Learning workshop:

- Language Learning Program Plan
- Language Learning Unit Plan
- Daily Language Learning Plan

## See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language learning plan

---

## What is a Language Learning Program Plan?

### Definition

A language learning program plan is a top-level plan to develop a personal language learning program to meet your language learning goals. It consists of your decisions regarding the language learning program you choose or develop and the major resources you use to achieve your goals.

### Generic

A Language Learning Program Plan is a kind of:

- language learning plan

### See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language learning program

---

## What is a Language Learning Unit Plan?

### Definition

A Language Learning Unit Plan is a subdivision of your language learning program made up of a series of daily lesson plans. The units may be determined in various ways, depending on the overall approach to language learning being followed.

### Parts

- A set of specific language learning objectives
- The techniques and activities planned to achieve the objectives
- The resources necessary to do the techniques and activities
- The time frame envisaged to achieve the objectives
- Criteria for determining whether or not the objectives have been achieved
- A set of daily lesson plans into which the above are distributed

### **Generic**

A Language Learning Unit Plan is a kind of:

- language learning plan

### **See also**

- How to make a unit plan
- Keywords: objectives (instructional), unit plans (language learning program)

---

## **What is a Daily Language Learning Plan?**

### **Definition**

A Daily Language Learning Plan is a subdivision of a unit plan within your overall language learning program. It consists of your language learning objectives for a given day and the strategies, techniques, and activities you decide to use to achieve them.

### **Examples**

To see a sample of a daily language learning plan, [click here](#).

### **Generic**

A Daily Language Learning Plan is a kind of:

- language learning plan

### **See also**

- How to make a Daily Language Learning Plan
- Keywords: daily plans (language learning program), objectives (instructional)

---

## Sample of daily language learning plan -- novice level

by Ellen Jackson

### Date

July 7, 200x

### Objectives

1. Cultural: Be able to call the LRP by an appropriate name by next session. Help him learn our names
2. Survival phrases and Power Tools: Elicit and record the following sentences and practice them for use the next session:
  - A general greeting that can be used any time of the day with our LRP
  - A response appropriate to the greeting above
  - A power tool I can use to ask the name of objects. Something like "What is this (called)?"
3. Vocabulary building
  - six nouns: pen, paper, candy, apple, banana, orange
  - colors: red, green, yellow, blue, white, black
  - numbers 1-5

### Equipment and props

- Tape recorder, microphone, cassette tape, extra batteries (if not using AC adaptor)
- candy, pens, colored pieces of paper, bananas, oranges and fruit props
- data book, pen

### Activities

1. Introduce myself and my partner and ask the LRP's name. Ask what we should call him.
2. Get acquainted briefly with the LRP. Find out his occupation. Has he been long in this city? Where from?
3. Explain to the LRP that we want to learn the following phrases to use in future

sessions:

- A single greeting appropriate for the time of the session (morning or afternoon). Ask if this greeting is okay to say to other people in other situations (formal vs informal).
  - A response appropriate to this greeting
  - How he would ask what something is called.
4. Record each of the above three times with pauses between.
  5. Do TPR to learn the following objects: pens, paper, candies, apples, oranges, bananas, 5 colors and numbers 1-5
  6. Record the objects, colors and numbers.
  7. Record a comprehension exercise that include combinations of above colors, numbers and objects the LRP selects randomly.
  8. Transcribe the new words and sentences of 3 and 5 above in the data book.

## Evaluation

The initial session went well with Chin Wu. She was very quick to catch on to TPR, and was very patient in repeating combinations until we had the words down 100%. We were able to complete all the objectives, although I felt very unsure how to transcribe some of the words at the end of the session. This could have eaten up considerable time and I had to consciously stop myself from trying to produce a perfect transcription. So in the end I have little confidence in the transcription, but find that it does help me to have something down on paper (being a strong visual learner) to trigger the memory of the sounds of the words.

---

OVERVIEW

## Structured language study options

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### Introduction

Most adults seem to learn a second language more quickly if they include a structured study component with informal practice. Structured study doesn't necessarily mean language school, although that is one of the options. In this section you will learn some of the characteristics of structured study programs in general, as well as information about the different options.



## **In this module group**

Here are the modules on structured language study options:

- Learning in a structured setting
- Language schools
- Independent language study
- Tutors
- Could I or should I develop my own program?

## **See also**

- Learning in an unstructured setting
- Keywords: choosing between language study options, formal language learning

---

## **Learning in a structured setting**

### **Introduction**

A structured or formal language learning setting is one set up especially for the purpose of learning the language. Although we usually think of a language classroom and a teacher when we think of a structured setting, there are various possibilities.

### **Options**

Here are some options for learning in a structured setting:

- Attend a language school.
- Do independent study with prepared language learning materials.
- Hire a tutor.
- Structure your own language program.

### **Structured Programs**

Here are some of the usual characteristics of structured programs:

- Grade language material, and add new items only as fast as you can reasonably be expected to learn them.

- Provide for you to learn in a controlled sequence.
- Give a lot of practice to develop automatic control (drill and practice activities).
- Add specific grammatical structures and vocabulary lists to language material.
- Put an emphasis on accuracy.

### **See also**

- Keywords: accuracy, drills, formal language learning, grammar

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## **Language schools**

### **See also**

For other structured language study options, see

- [OVERVIEW: Structured language study options](#)

---

## **Independent language study**

### **Introduction**

Independent language study refers to following a language instruction program someone else developed, without a teacher and other students. You do it at your own rate of speed, and at the time and place you choose.

### **Comparison**

Here are some ways independent language learning is like learning in a classroom:

- A lot of practice may be given to develop automatic control (drill and practice activities).
- Language material is generally graded.
- Language material may be accompanied by presentation of specific grammatical structures and vocabulary lists.
- Learning is structured.
- There is often an emphasis on accuracy.

## Materials

More and more materials are available for people who want to study foreign languages on their own.

The possibilities include the following:

- Courses combining written materials and audio recordings.
  - Correspondence courses, where a teacher is available to correct work and assess progress via mail.
- Video courses, often with accompanying workbook.
- Computer-assisted language learning materials (CALL). These may include programs using
  - compact discs, and
  - videodisks.
- Books with no accompanying video or audio materials.

## Caution

Be skeptical of any courses that promise you can learn to speak German in three weeks or three months by listening to a recording for 30 minutes a day. Whatever these courses promise, they cannot deliver communicative competence with that amount of exposure in that amount of time.

## Self-instruction

There may be no classes in your area that teach the language you need to learn. Your schedule may not permit you to attend classes that do exist. In these cases, self-instruction may be your only option.

## See also

For other structured language study options, see

- OVERVIEW: Structured language study options
- Keywords: computer-assisted language learning , independent language study, media

---

## Tutors

## Definition

A tutor is a speaker of the language who works with you individually. Instruction from a tutor may be more or less structured, depending on the tutor and on your needs.

## Characteristics

Here are some characteristics of working with a tutor:

- There is more flexibility and opportunity to tailor instruction to meet your needs than in a classroom, where there are other students to consider.
- A tutor often works with you on specific problem areas, rather than presenting a whole course of instruction.
- There is more opportunity to ask questions and get personal feedback than in a classroom.
- You determine the number of classes and the rate at which new material is presented.
- You may be able to find a tutor who can teach you at times that fit your schedule better than classes.
- It may be difficult to get someone to teach you enough hours to make rapid progress, if this is your only source of language instruction.
- It will probably be more expensive per hour than attending a class.

## See also

For other structured language study options, see

- [OVERVIEW: Structured language study options](#)
- **Keywords:** tutors (language)

---

## Could I or should I develop my own program?

### Introduction

It *is* possible and sometimes necessary to develop your own language learning program.

**Example:** There are no language schools or independent study materials available.

If you have a choice of doing it yourself or following a program somebody else has prepared, what should you do?

## Benefits

Here are some benefits of developing your own program:

- You are in control of what you learn so it should be both relevant and interesting.
- You can use an approach that fits your personality and learning style.
- You can go at your own pace.

## Disadvantages

Here are some of the disadvantages of developing your own program:

- You may need to allow as much time to plan daily activities as you will need to do the activities. In effect you are having to make your own lesson plans for each day.
- You may be wasting your time by developing your own program if there are good materials available which are effective in helping people learn.
- You do not have a teacher available to give you feedback and evaluation.

## Resources

Here is what you need when you develop your own program:

- A clear model to follow  
**Note:** It is possible to design your own program without following a model, but if you know enough to do that you probably do not need this book .
- A clear idea of the principles underlying the model and the guidelines
- Access to speakers of the language, preferably a speech community
- Time for planning and developing your program, as well as for doing language activities

## See also

For other structured language study options, see

- OVERVIEW: Structured language study options
- Keywords: choosing between language study options, language learning program, planning

---

## Learning in an unstructured setting

### Introduction

An unstructured or informal language learning setting is one where you immerse yourself in a speech community where the language you want to learn is spoken. You learn through the everyday experiences of life.

### Characteristics

Here are some characteristic features of learning in an unstructured setting:

- There are many fluent speakers around.
- People talk to you to communicate with you, not to teach you their language.
- The learning takes place in open, unconstrained areas, with lots of physical context.
- The language is normal and uncontrolled (not bookish): there is a wide range of natural styles and registers.
- There is no systematic approach to new material; learning tends to be uneven and unstructured.
- Learners may not be aware that they are learning or aware of what specifically they have learned.
- Learners go through stages before learning to communicate.
- Communication is not organized around the learner's needs.
- Language is experienced in a variety of natural social contexts, therefore, it is possible to learn a lot about the nature of interaction and appropriate ways of speaking.
- Opportunities for practice are unlimited.
- Some learners may learn to speak fairly fluently but continue to make grammar mistakes. These eventually "fossilize" and resist change thereafter, even when a deliberate attempt is made to work on them. This is attributed by some people to the fact that the learners had no correction when learning.

### See also

- Keywords: context, informal language learning, register, speech community

---

## What is an approach to language learning?

### Definition

An approach to language learning consists of the techniques and activities you decide to use to learn a language, based on

- your beliefs about language and how it is learned
- your learning style preferences, and
- the constraints of the learning situation.

### Examples

Several approaches to language acquisition are included in the Language Learning bookshelf. There are four approaches based on learning style preferences:

*Approaches to language learning based on learning style preferences*

- The Relational Approach to language learning
- The Analytical Approach to language learning
- The Structured Approach to language learning
- The Energetic Approach to language learning

**See:** For discussion of these four approaches, see *Approaches to language learning based on learning style*.

### See also

- Keywords: approaches to language learning

Ways to approach language learning

Essays on Field Language Learning

---

## What is a language learning program?

### Definition

A language learning program is a detailed plan of action to help you achieve your language learning goals. A program consists of

- language learning objectives
- strategies to achieve the objectives
- things to do to implement the strategies, and
- resources to help you meet the objectives.

## Discussion

You can be in charge of your own personal language learning program, even if you go to language school or use commercially-available materials. Keep your goals in mind and see how each resource and activity helps you achieve them.

## See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language learning program, objectives (instructional), strategies

---

## What is a language learning resource?

### Definition

A language learning resource is any person, program, or object that helps you achieve your language learning goals.

### Examples

Here are some examples of language learning resources:

- Audiotapes and videotapes of language material
- Dictionaries and other reference books
- Independent language study materials
- A language associate
- Language learning computer software
- Language school
- A language tutor
- Radio, television, and videotapes

## See also



- Keywords: computer-assisted language learning , dictionaries, language associates, language schools, media, resources, tutors (language), video

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## OVERVIEW

# Information to help you check your progress

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## Introduction

Here are some of the concepts and other information that you need to understand to help you check your language learning progress.

**See also:**      Checking your progress

## In this module group

Here are the modules on information to help you check your progress:

- Can I really evaluate myself?
- What is a proficiency scale?
- The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale
- Correspondence of proficiency scales
- OVERVIEW: What you can do at different proficiency levels
- Self-assessment checklists based on proficiency guidelines

## See also

- Keywords: evaluating proficiency, progress (language learning)

---

# Can I really evaluate myself?

## Introduction

If you are not an expert in the language, how can you assess your own proficiency in it? Self-assessment does have its limitations, but it can also be very useful.

## Limitations

The disadvantage of doing self-evaluation is that it is hard to assess the accuracy of your

own writing or speech. Some people judge themselves too gently, and some judge themselves too harshly.

## Benefits

Here are some benefits of self-evaluation:

- You see areas in which you made progress and those in which you need more work.
- If your progress in a certain area does not satisfy you, you can make changes in your program.
- You can encourage yourself by seeing how much progress you *have* made!
- If no teacher is available to evaluate you, self-assessment is the only way to know how you are really doing.

## Scope

Here are the kinds of things you should evaluate:

- Try to decide how well you control the material in your lessons or self-structured program.
- Look at your overall proficiency level in each skill.
- Try to decide your rate of progress.

## See also

- Keywords: evaluating proficiency

---

## What is a proficiency scale?

### Definition

A proficiency scale is a set of descriptions of what you can do in a language. Each level in the scale describes a stage in your development of competence.

### Benefits

Proficiency scales are beneficial when

- setting language learning goals, or
- evaluating your progress.

## Instances

Here are two Proficiency scales:

- ILR (FSI) scale

## Uses

Proficiency scales are useful in the following ways:

- To decide what to aim for
- To know when you achieve your goals

### The ILR (FSI) Scale

The five-level ILR scale was originally developed by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the United States government. The scale describes the language proficiency needed by the diplomatic corps to carry out their duties in embassies and to carry out other official business. Eventually, other U.S. government agencies adopted the same scale, so it is now called the Interagency Language Roundtable scale, or ILR scale. The scale describes overall proficiency from 0 (no proficiency) to 5 (mother tongue speaker).

Although very useful and widely referred to, this scale has two drawbacks for language learners and teachers:

- It refers principally to speaking ability and does not directly mention the skills of listening comprehension, reading, and writing.
- There are only five steps in the scale and the distance between them is very large. Also the steps are not the same size.
  - It takes much longer to get from Level 1 to Level 2 than it does to get from Level 0 to Level 1.
  - It takes even longer to get from Level 2 to Level 3.

Most language learners would be happy to achieve Level 3: working professional proficiency. This level represents quite a high achievement and is as far as most organized language study programs can take you. Therefore, many educators feel it is helpful to have more divisions in the lower proficiency levels.

### ACTFL guidelines

In 1982 the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) set out to develop a scale compatible with the FSI scale. The scale describes all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and has more divisions in the lower levels. It was better defined in 1986 and that is the scale used for reference here.

**See:** Correspondence of proficiency scales to see how the ACTFL guidelines correspond to the FSI scale.

### **See also**

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, Foreign Service Institute (FSI), ILR proficiency scale, evaluating proficiency, language proficiency, language skills (4 basic)

---

## **The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale**

### **Description**

The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale is a set of descriptions of abilities to communicate in a language. It was originally developed by the United States Foreign Service Institute, and is still widely known as the FSI scale. It consists of descriptions of five levels of language proficiency.

### **Levels**

Click on the level for which you would like to see the definition:

- Elementary proficiency (S-1)
- Limited Working proficiency (S-2)
- Professional Working proficiency (S-3)
- Full Professional proficiency (S-4)
- Native or Bilingual proficiency (S-5)

### **Sources**

These descriptions are a product of U.S. Government grants and are in the public domain. They are cited here from Higgs 1984, Appendix B.

### **See also**

Much of the material in the Language Learning workshop about developing your proficiency has been built around a slightly different scale called the ACTFL Guidelines. For a comparison of the ILR and ACTFL scales, see the following:

- What is a proficiency scale?
- Correspondence of proficiency scales

- Keywords: ILR proficiency scale, language proficiency

---

## Correspondence of proficiency scales

### Introduction

The following chart gives the relationship between levels of the ACTFL and ILR proficiency scales.

### Comparison Chart

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

### See also

For more information about these scales, and about checking your progress against them, see the following:

- The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale
- Checking your progress
- Keywords: language proficiency, levels of language proficiency

---

OVERVIEW

## What you can do at different proficiency levels

---

### In this module group

Here are the modules on what you can do at different proficiency levels:

- OVERVIEW: What you can understand people say at different proficiency levels
- OVERVIEW: What you can say at different proficiency levels
- OVERVIEW: What you can read at different proficiency levels
- OVERVIEW: What you can write at different proficiency levels

---

OVERVIEW

## What you can understand people say at different proficiency levels

---

### Introduction

You can get an idea of your listening proficiency level by comparing what you understand with the lists below.

### In this module group

Here are the modules on what you can understand people say at different proficiency levels:

- What you can understand people say at Novice level
- What you can understand people say at Intermediate level
- What you can understand people say at Advanced level

- What you can understand people say at Superior level
- What you can understand people say at Distinguished level

### **See also**

- Keywords: listening proficiency
- 

## **What you can understand people say at Novice level**

### **Novice**

Here are some of the things you can understand people say at Novice level:

- Names of common objects
- Names of common food and drink items
- Words for common actions
- Common greetings and farewell expressions
- Basic warnings and commands, such as Stop!, Watch out!, and Be careful!
- The most basic words describing size, color, or age
- Simple questions and statements that use words from the categories above

### **See also**

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)
- 

## **What you can understand people say at Intermediate level**

### **Intermediate**

Here are some of the things you can understand at Intermediate level:

- Basic directions on how to get somewhere
  - Greetings and other very commonly occurring social routines
  - Questions about your personal background, family, and why you are in the country
  - Questions about your personal interests and activities, such as hobbies, sports, and
-

subjects you know a lot about

- Short, routine telephone conversations, well enough to be able to take a simple message for someone
- Bits and pieces of radio or television announcements and news reports dealing with familiar topics or events
- A description of a place or a person
- Locations and times, if making arrangements to meet somebody later
- Prices and amounts of money you need to pay in a shop, store, or market
- Questions the shopkeeper might ask you about what exactly you want
- Familiar words in conversations between mother tongue speakers (If the topic is familiar, you might get the main ideas, but might not understand all they are saying. )
- Enough to carry on short conversations on concrete topics with friendly mother tongue speakers used to dealing with foreigners, if they make an effort to help you to understand

### **See also**

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines), radio, telephones, television

---

## **What you can understand people say at Advanced level**

### **Advanced**

Here are some of the things you can understand people say at Advanced level:

- An account of an event that happened in the past
- Events someone expects will happen in the future
- A description of a simple process
- A brief summary of facts about a subject
- Oral instructions on how to do something
- Advice
- The advantages and disadvantages of a course of action



- A description of a place you have never visited
- Someone comparing or contrasting two objects or places
- Familiar topics beyond your immediate situation
- Most news broadcasts and factual reports on television and radio
- Information someone asks you in an interview
- Short lectures on familiar topics

**See also**

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines), radio, television

---

## **What you can understand people say at Superior level**

### **Superior**

Here are some things you can understand people say at Superior level:

- Unspoken emotional nuances of speakers in most communication situations
- A detailed description of a complex object or procedure
- A discussion of an abstract professional topic
- Hypotheses about what might happen in a certain situation
- Debates on both sides of an issue
- Personal points of view on a controversial subject
- Reasons someone gives for acting in a certain way
- Unspoken messages, when people hedge, evade an answer, or try to get out of a commitment
- Speeches or academic lectures
- The dialogue in films
- Media coverage

**See also**

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## What you can understand people say at Distinguished level

### Distinguished

Here are some things you can understand people say at Distinguished level:

- Fine points of the issues debated at meetings of local government agencies, such as city councils or town councils
- Plots of dramatic presentations and the artistic merits of the script and the presentation
- Dialogues in films, including slang
- Editorials on the radio or television
- Different points of view expressed at symposia
- Points of view in academic debates
- Public policy statements
- Literary readings
- Most jokes and puns
- General conversations you overhear between mother-tongue speakers

### See also

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

OVERVIEW

## What you can say at different proficiency levels

---

### Introduction

You can get an idea of your speaking proficiency by comparing your ability with the lists below.

### In this module group

Here are the modules on what you can say at different proficiency levels:

- What you can say at Novice level
- What you can say at Intermediate level
- What you can say at Advanced level
- What you can say at Superior level
- What you can say at Distinguished level

### **See also**

- Keywords: speaking proficiency

---

## **What you can say at Novice level**

### **Novice**

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to say at Novice level:

- Greet people politely
- Thank people politely
- Say "yes" and "no"
- Use memorized phrases to order a cup of coffee or food
- Count to 100
- Say good-bye politely
- Give your name
- Tell where you are from
- Name concrete objects, such as
  - furniture
  - plants
  - animals
  - tools
  - machines, and
  - food items

- Name classes of people, such as
  - men
  - women
  - boys
  - girls, and
  - babies
- Name colors
- Name sizes of objects or age of people, such as a big boat or a small child

### **See also**

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## **What you can say at Intermediate level**

### **Intermediate**

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to say at Intermediate level:

- Introduce yourself, giving your name and basic personal information
- Give directions on how to get from one place to another
- Describe your health problems to a doctor or nurse
- Tell about your family, giving names and simple information about them such as their occupations or what they look like
- Arrange to meet someone at a particular time and place and date in the near future
- Describe typical routine activities, such as what you usually do on the weekend
- Request items, discuss prices, and handle currency in a situation involving a purchase
- Ask questions about menu items, order food, and ask for and pay a bill at a restaurant
- Describe in detail a particular place, such as a school, park, or store
- Talk about things you like to do, such as leisure activities, favorite hobbies or pastimes
- Talk about things you expect to do in the future, such as a planned trip or activity

## See also

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## What you can say at Advanced level

### Advanced

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to say at Advanced level:

- Describe a sequence of events that happened in the past
- Describe things that used to happen in the past, such as things you used to do when you were younger, or people and places you used to know or visit
- Compare and contrast two objects, customs, or places
- Talk about your future plans or goals
- Explain a simple process you know how to do, such as making a cake or repairing a tire
- Give instructions about what you would like someone to do, explaining the steps involved in carrying out an activity, such as when telling a housekeeper how you would like her to wash the clothes
- Give a brief, organized, factual summary of what happened in an event you attended
- Give advice to someone faced with making a decision, giving reasons for your advice
- Lodge a complaint, giving the reasons and details of why you are dissatisfied
- Express personal apologies clearly and appropriately to someone you have offended
- State the advantages and disadvantages of a situation or a decision
- Tell someone what you would do in a hypothetical situation, such as if you suddenly received a lot of money
- Answer the telephone at home or at work
- Describe your job and the organization you work for
- Direct people to the right building or office
- Handle simple job-related inquiries

## See also

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## What you can say at Superior level

### Superior

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to say at Superior level:

- Persuade people to do something they do not want to do or to stop doing something you do not like
- Describe a complex object, such as a car or bicycle or computer in detail, using the correct vocabulary
- Present arguments on both sides of a familiar issue or topic and evaluate the merits of the arguments
- Discuss a professional topic at length
- Explain in detail a nonroutine, complex process, such as how to do grammatical analysis or how to perform an operation
- Present a talk at a professional meeting
- Tell someone in detail the possible consequences of a certain situation, for example, if the price of coffee were to rise suddenly
- Express what you think might happen if something unexpected occurs
- Propose a course of action and defend your proposal in such a way that people might be persuaded to accept your idea
- State a personal point of view on a subject, including controversial issues, explaining why you hold your beliefs
- Handle formal business situations
- Talk to dignitaries or influential people
- Discuss issues in the news

### See also

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## What you can say at Distinguished level

### Distinguished

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to say at Distinguished level:

- Do informal interpreting
- Take part in mediating or negotiating between two parties
- Discuss in detail highly abstract or unfamiliar topics
- Tailor the style and content of your presentation on the spur of the moment to an audience different from the one you had expected

### See also

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

#### OVERVIEW

## What you can read at different proficiency levels

---

### Introduction

You can get an idea of your reading proficiency level by comparing what you can read with the lists below.

### In this module group

Here are the modules on what you can read at different proficiency levels:

- What you can read at Novice level
- What you can read at Intermediate level
- What you can read at Advanced level
- What you can read at Superior level
- What you can read at Distinguished level

### See also

- Keywords: reading proficiency

---

## What you can read at Novice level

### Novice

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to read at Novice level:

- The letters in an alphabet or syllabic writing system or a few characters in a system that uses characters
- Menus
- Timetables
- Maps
- Road signs
- Signs above shops

### See also

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## What you can read at Intermediate level

### Intermediate

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to read at Intermediate level:

- Simple, connected texts about predictable subjects
- Public service messages or instructions
- Short, straightforward descriptions of persons, places, and things written for a wide audience
- Newspaper headlines
- Basic written directions
- Questions about your personal background, your family, and why you are here in the country



- Written descriptions of what a place or a person looks like

### **See also**

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)
- 

## **What you can read at Advanced level**

### **Advanced**

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to read at Advanced level:

- Short stories
- News items
- Encyclopedia entries
- Short biographies
- Personal correspondence
- Routine business letters
- Simple technical information for the general reader

### **See also**

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)
- 

## **What you can read at Superior level**

### **Superior**

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to read at Superior level:

- Expository prose on a wide range of subjects, including unfamiliar material
  - Newspaper editorials
  - Personal and business correspondence
  - Technical reports
  - Political commentaries
-

- Official documents
- Academic texts
- Professional papers
- Literary texts

### **See also**

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## **What you can read at Distinguished level**

### **Distinguished**

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to read at Distinguished level:

- Sophisticated editorials
- Specialized journal articles
- Novels
- Plays
- Poems

### **See also**

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

### OVERVIEW

## **What you can write at different proficiency levels**

---

### **Introduction**

You can get an idea of your writing proficiency level by comparing what you can write with the lists below.

### **In this module group**

Here are the modules on what you can write at different proficiency levels:

- What you can write at Novice level
- What you can write at Intermediate level
- What you can write at Advanced level
- What you can write at Superior level
- What you can write at Distinguished level

### **See also**

- Keywords: writing proficiency

---

## **What you can write at Novice level**

### **Novice**

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to write at Novice level:

- Information for hotel registration forms
- Information for travel documents
- Simple fixed expressions
- Words or sentences you have learned
- Dates and numbers

### **See also**

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## **What you can write at Intermediate level**

### **Intermediate**

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to write at Intermediate level:

- Short, simple personal letters about your personal preferences, daily routine or everyday events
- Telephone messages

- Postcards
- Short synopses
- Class or lecture notes on familiar topics
- Simple descriptions
- Simple paraphrases of things you hear or read
- Short essays about your life, work, or experience

### **See also**

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## **What you can write at Advanced level**

### **Advanced**

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to write at Advanced level:

- Routine social correspondence
- A discourse of at least several paragraphs on familiar topics
- Stories or anecdotes about things that have happened to you
- Straightforward, informal business correspondence
- Concrete facts about special interests or fields of competence
- Lecture notes
- Cohesive summaries and resumes of things you have read or heard
- Descriptions of persons, places, and activities

### **See also**

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## **What you can write at Superior level**

### **Superior**

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to write at Superior level:

- All types of social and business correspondence
- Memos
- Short research papers
- Statements of your position in areas of special interest or in your professional field
- Essays

**See also**

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## **What you can write at Distinguished level**

### **Distinguished**

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to write at Distinguished level:

- Letters to the editor
- Articles for professional journals
- Short stories
- Poetry
- Plays
- Lyrics to music

**See also**

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

---

## **Self-assessment checklists based on proficiency guidelines**

### **Introduction**

You can use checklists to help you evaluate your proficiency in each of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). These checklists include things a person at a given level can typically do in the target language. There are checklists for each of the

four basic language skills, with a separate list for reading and writing if you are learning an unwritten or recently-written language.

You can click on any of the items listed below to see the checklist and print it out. You have permission to photocopy the checklists for your own use.

## Checklists

Here are the checklists based on proficiency guidelines:

- [Self-assessment checklist for listening PDF\(6\)](#)
- [Self-assessment checklist for speaking PDF\(7\)](#)
- [Self-assessment checklist for reading PDF\(8\)](#)
- [Self-assessment checklist for reading unwritten languages PDF\(9\)](#)
- [Self-assessment checklist for writing PDF\(10\)](#)
- [Self-assessment checklist for writing unwritten languages PDF\(11\)](#)

## Warning

It can be hard to have a realistic view of your own ability in a language. Many people overestimate their ability to perform certain tasks, while others underestimate themselves. If you are using these checklists, you may want to talk over your evaluation of yourself with a speaker of the language or a language learning consultant. It would also be a good idea to use other proficiency-testing methods as a check.

## See also

- [Keywords: checklists \(language learning\), evaluating proficiency, language skills \(4 basic\), self-assessment](#)

## Endnotes

### 1 (Popup - Popup)

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