

Interagency Language Roundtable Skill Level Descriptions for Proficiency – Writing

Preface

The following Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Skill Level Descriptions (SLDs) describe proficiency as the functional ability to produce written language that reflects current usage. The SLDs characterize proficiency ranging from no communicative ability to mastery. They constitute an ordinal scale that includes six ranked base levels from 0 to 5. They illustrate, but do not exhaustively characterize, the proficiency a person may demonstrate at a given level on the scale.

Control of a base level (Levels 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) typically implies control of the previous levels' aspects. A higher level of performance in one aspect does not justify a higher general proficiency rating. Level 5 includes the features of all levels. Still, as with all levels, Level 5 is a range and performance will vary.

The base levels of 0 to 4 are expanded by plus levels. Plus levels describe proficiency that substantially exceeds one base level and does not fully meet the criteria of the next base level. To merit a plus level, the demonstrated proficiency must match the plus level description and not be merely a strong performance at the base level.

The SLDs describe four aspects of language proficiency: functional ability, precision of forms and meanings, content meaningfulness, and contextual appropriateness. Functional ability refers to the communicative acts or tasks that an individual can accomplish. There are no functional abilities specific to the plus levels. Precision of forms and meanings refers to accuracy, range, and complexity. Content meaningfulness refers to the relevance and substantive coverage of topics. Contextual appropriateness refers to register, acceptability, and appropriateness of language for the intended audience.

The SLDs are presented in an official prose version. Each level description begins with a bolded main statement that summarizes the features of that level. Supporting statements follow the main statement and describe the four aspects in detail.

Level 0 (No Proficiency)

Unable to write the language in almost any context. Has essentially no functional communicative ability. Written production is limited to occasional isolated letters, characters, or words.

Level 0+ (Memorized Proficiency)

Able to write some memorized, isolated words and phrases with random accuracy and little regard to context. Can produce letters of an alphabetic system and some of the most basic elements of a syllabary or character system. Can write some isolated words, simple lists of common items, and memorized phrases, allowing for minimal exchanges. Writing is telegraphic. Vocabulary is extremely limited and random. No control of structures, but some use of structures may be evident in memorized phrases. Range of topics is extremely limited. May be able to write memorized greetings and introductions. May show isolated instances of politeness.

Level 1 (Elementary Proficiency)

Able to produce simple statements and exchanges, typically on topics related to self, despite pervasive errors and limited contextual appropriateness. Has functional, but limited proficiency. Can write simple phrases, statements, and questions. Able to combine words and phrases to meet basic needs. Can fill in simple forms and produce simple communications, such as short notes. Writes in disconnected or loosely connected phrases and simple sentences. Able to write simple notes, such as short texts, email, and messages. Has little to no ability to employ organizational devices. Vocabulary is frequently inaccurate and generally restricted to the highest frequency items. Little ability to make cultural references. Displays some use of basic structural relations, although errors mark almost every statement; accuracy is limited. Makes pervasive errors in spelling and punctuation. Topics are generally related to self, family, or immediate environment, including daily activities, such as, but not limited to, directions, simple messages, or basic personal information. Often lacks linguistic resources to stay on topic. Conveys basic ideas with little to no details. Demonstrates an extremely limited command of cultural norms and expectations. Extremely limited ability to express register other than in basic courtesy requirements. Cannot easily articulate mood, feeling, or emotion.

Level 1+ (Elementary Proficiency, Plus)

Able to initiate and maintain simple written correspondence in areas beyond most basic needs, though inaccurately and not always appropriately. May exhibit some frequently used organizational devices. Shows good control of high frequency vocabulary, but vocabulary is typically inaccurate elsewhere. May make some cultural references. Accuracy in basic

grammatical relations is inconsistent. Use of person, place, and time references is often incorrect. Generally, cannot sustain cohesiveness in longer productions. Can write about personal life, such as family and activities, and has a limited ability to discuss work and major current events. Sometimes able to write on topic in routine content, but has a limited ability to give details. Demonstrates little command of cultural norms and expectations. Shows limited ability to apply basic social norms and etiquette. May be able to convey some isolated instances of mood, feeling, emotion, or position.

Level 2 (Limited Working Proficiency)

Able to adequately write straightforward documents and participate in everyday exchanges for routine work requirements and most correspondence. Can communicate in routine personal and social media interactions and can handle complications in otherwise routine written transactions. Can typically report facts and provide straightforward descriptions, directions, instructions, and narrations across timeframes. Can write connected material that is minimally cohesive and can demonstrate sequencing and connected phrases such as short reports of factual, frequently occurring events, business correspondence, routine email and text messages, and user comments. Has some ability to employ frequently used rhetorical devices, such as repetition and exaggeration. Can readily produce high frequency vocabulary that is appropriate for routine communication, but may be unusual, imprecise, or lead to paraphrasing elsewhere. Can sometimes make references to historical or cultural events, such as movies, famous people, books, or major holidays. Generally, has command of simple structures and basic grammatical relations. Errors in complex structures are frequent and may be patterned or cause misunderstanding. Makes errors in spelling and punctuation, but shows some control of the most common formatting and punctuation conventions. Can write straightforward, factual material about personal life, such as family, activities, or work, or major current events. Often able to write on topic in routine content. Can provide some supporting details, but does not always make the message clear or cover the topic thoroughly. May demonstrate some command of common cultural norms, albeit inconsistently. Generally, language is culturally awkward. Demonstrates some social conventions of writing. Applies basic social norms and etiquette, albeit inconsistently, and does not control register. May be able to convey some mood, feeling, emotion, or position, though it is not always appropriate to the context.

Level 2+ (Limited Working Proficiency, Plus)

Able to communicate fully in many informal and everyday contexts; in some formal and professional contexts, writes with language that is often, but not always, acceptable and effective. Often communicates a coherent message; however, the message conveyed is not consistently clear or there may be occasional instances of miscommunication. May employ some common rhetorical devices. Uses high frequency and some mid frequency vocabulary, but

cannot always make appropriate lexical choices. May use some widely used idiomatic expressions and cultural references, though not always accurately. Controls most basic structures, but control of complex structures is limited. Writing may contain awkward or inaccurate phrasing of ideas and mistaken time, space, or person references. Shows considerable ability to write effectively on topics relating to interests and special fields of competence. Information conveyed is typically on topic. Generally, provides supporting details, but not consistently across topics. May be able to fulfill cultural norms and expectations in routine and some professional texts. Is often able to adhere to social norms and etiquette, such as formal and informal forms of writing, but not consistently. Able to verbally convey some mood, feeling, emotion, or position, though inconsistently.

Level 3 (General Professional Proficiency)

Able to write with sufficient accuracy to be effective in formal and informal contexts on general social and professional topics and tasks. Can perform a range of tasks such as explain and compare societal issues and their implications, state and defend a position or policy, support opinions, and hypothesize. Able to produce cohesive interactive and non-interactive texts with clear relationships of ideas. Can write reports, summaries, and short research papers. May employ some common rhetorical devices, such as simile and metaphor. Uses mid frequency vocabulary that is sufficiently broad to clearly discuss a range of professional matters and abstract or societal issues. Uses widely known proverbs and idiomatic expressions. Able to make some cultural references. Uses a variety of structures, including basic and some complex structures. In general, basic structures are controlled, though there are occasional structural errors that minimally interfere with communication. Punctuation and formatting are generally controlled. Can write about own interests and fields of competence; otherwise, linguistic limitations in depth and precision generally restrict language use to matters of general interest. Information conveyed is on topic. Supports ideas in a clear manner without much unnecessary information. Able to fulfill common cultural norms and expectations in routine and professional interactions. Writing may be culturally awkward at times. Can usually control formal and informal registers in various contexts. Has command of most social writing conventions. Can convey some mood, feeling, emotion, or position appropriate to the context.

Level 3+ (General Professional Proficiency, Plus)

Able to write in a number of prose styles with accuracy, using some culturally appropriate language tailored to some audiences on a range of topics. Employs some complex discourse strategies to organize thoughts and present a clear, coherent message. Weakness or unevenness in language use may result in a lack of precision. Can use some rhetorical devices for targeted effect or emphasis. Lexicon is broad and includes a range of nuanced words and phrases, with some inaccuracies. Uses some appropriate idiomatic expressions and cultural references. Uses complex structures although not all are accurate or controlled. Can write on

many professional topics, and to some degree on concepts relating to social, cultural, and theoretical topics. Supports ideas thoroughly without unnecessary information. Able to fulfill some cultural norms and expectations in a variety of texts, although there may be instances of awkwardness. Controls formal and informal registers and can sometimes use register to tailor the message or make it more effective. Mood, feeling, emotion, or stance sometimes enhances the message conveyed.

Level 4 (Advanced Professional Proficiency)

Able to write with considerable precision using culturally appropriate language tailored to a variety of audiences on a wide range of topics. Able to write for a specific audience, tailoring language with subtlety and nuance. Effectively adjusts register as appropriate to the situation to advise, persuade, negotiate, or counsel. Can engage in writing on matters of disagreement, advocate a position at length, and represent a point of view other than one's own. Employs discourse strategies to organize thoughts and present them in a convincing manner, such as appropriate rhetorical devices or intentional shifts of topic and tone. Texts include literature, editorials, satire, commentaries, and complex research papers. Can use many rhetorical devices for targeted effect or emphasis. Vocabulary is consistently extensive and includes low frequency items. Uses cultural references appropriately and to further their argument or add emphasis. Controls many complex structures, including complex embedding. Errors are sporadic and may be part of acceptable language use in certain contexts. Orthography, punctuation, and formatting not only provide structure, but may enhance meaning and presentation. Can write on many social, cultural, and theoretical topics, including those which do not bear directly on a professional specialty. May incorporate another relevant topic or make additional informative points to present a broader view. Presents information to support ideas clearly and thoroughly. Able to fulfill many cultural norms and expectations in a variety of texts, although there may be instances of awkwardness. Commands most social conventions of writing. Demonstrates an ability to shift register or tailor writing. Is generally able to convey mood, feeling, emotion, or stance to add effect, such as emphasis, certainty, uncertainty, or authority.

Level 4+ (Advanced Professional Proficiency, Plus)

Able to write with precision, using diverse linguistic resources to produce articulate, tailored, and nuanced language in most contexts with only rare mistakes. Uses writing strategies flexibly to enhance the effectiveness of the message conveyed. Employs a wide range of rhetorical devices. Incorporates nuanced phrasing and low frequency vocabulary that are rarely imprecise, but sometimes with weaknesses, for example in idioms, colloquialisms, or cultural references. Has a wide range and control of complex structures, including complex embedding.

Makes few mistakes. Can address most topics to some extent. Can elaborate on the implications of most societal issues. Able to fulfill most cultural norms and expectations in a variety of texts, although there may be rare instances of awkwardness. Tailors writing to readers to support arguments in most instances. Mood, feeling, emotion, or stance usually enhances the message conveyed.

Level 5 (Functionally Native Proficiency)

Able to write with clarity of expression and precision, using diverse linguistic resources to produce articulate, nuanced, and engaging language in almost any context. Can produce almost any official, semi-official, and non-professional writing for a specific audience, purpose, task, or setting. Can effectively weave together different concepts to create novel ideas and perspectives. Demonstrates a mastery of the language. Able to write in an articulate and precise manner, although the rare error may occur. Employs a wide range of rhetorical devices exceptionally well to achieve a desired goal or effect. Demonstrates a precise and extensive control of nuanced, low frequency vocabulary, as well as idioms, colloquialisms, and cultural references. Controls almost all structures of the language at all levels. Can write extensively on the implications of many topics and address almost any topic to some extent. Information presented is relevant and often incorporates other topics to present a broader view or new perspective. Presents information to support ideas clearly, thoroughly, and concisely. Able to fulfill cultural norms and expectations in a wide variety of texts. Masterfully tailors writing to provide convincing argument particular to the audience. Can sustain shifts between registers for effect and impact. Uses almost all formal and informal registers and genres of written language. Able to articulate mood, feeling, emotion, or stance effectively to set a mood, persuade the reader or produce an emotional response. Can use intonation, tone, stress patterns, humor, and other features to add emphasis, certainty, uncertainty, authority, or other stances.