Computerized Assessment of Proficiency (CAP)

Task Specifications

Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS)

University of Oregon

Contents

Introduction

This document was prepared by the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS). CASLS is a Title VI K-16 National Foreign Language Resource Center located at the University of Oregon. CASLS core mission is promoting international literacy by supporting communities of educators and by partnering with those communities to develop a comprehensive system of proficiency-based tools for lifelong language learning and teaching.

This document describes the development of reading tasks for the Computerized Assessment of Proficiency (CAP). The Computerized Assessment of Proficiency (CAP) is an online test of proficiency developed by CASLS. Many of the test items developed for CAP are licensed by Avant Assessments and delivered operationally under the name STAMP (**STA**ndards-based **M**easurement of **P**roficiency).

Test level

CASLS reports assessment results on the CASLS Benchmark Scale. Several points along the scale have been designated as *Benchmark Levels*. These Benchmark Levels include verbal descriptions of the proficiency profile of a typical student at that point in the scale.

The Benchmark Level descriptions derive their lineage from well-known proficiency scales, notably the FSI/ILR scale and the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The relationship between the scales is shown in the following Table:

Benchmark Levels and Corresponding Scales

ILR	ACTFL	CASLS Scale	
3	Superior	10 Benchmark Level	Refining
2+	Advanced-High	9	Expanding
2	Advanced-Mid	8 Benchmark Level	
	Advanced-Low	7	
1+	Intermediate-High	6	Transitioning
1	Intermediate-Mid	5 Benchmark Level	
	Intermediate-Low	4	
0+	Novice-High	3 Benchmark Level	Beginning
	Novice-Mid	2	
0	Novice-Low	1	

Benchmark Levels

Level 3 (Beginning proficiency): Beginning proficiency is characterized by a reliance on a limited repertoire of learned phrases and basic vocabulary. A student at this level is able recognize the purpose of basic texts, such as menus, tickets, short notes, etc. by understanding common words and expressions. The student is able to understand a core of simple, formulaic utterances in both reading and listening. In writing and speaking, the student is able to communicate basic information through lists of words and some memorized patterns.

Level 5 (Transitioning proficiency): Transitioning proficiency is characterized by the ability to use language knowledge to understand information in everyday materials. The learner is transitioning from memorized words and phrases to original production, albeit still rather limited. In reading, students at this level should be able to understand the main ideas and explicit details in everyday materials such as short letters, menus, and advertisements. In listening, students at this level can follow short conversations and announcements on common topics and answer questions about the main idea and explicitly stated details. In speaking and writing, students are not limited to formulaic utterances, but can express factual information through the manipulation of grammatical structures.

Level 8 (Expanding proficiency): Expanding proficiency is characterized by the ability to understand and use language for straightforward informational purposes. At this level, students can understand the content of most factual, non-specialized materials intended for a general audience, such as newspaper articles, television programs, and the like. In writing and speaking, students have sufficient control over language to successfully express a wide range of relationships (e.g, temporal, sequential, cause and effect, etc.).

Level 10 (Refining proficiency): Refining proficiency is characterized by the ability to understand and use language that serves a rhetorical purpose and involves reading or listening "between the lines". Students at this level can follow spoken and written opinions and arguments, such as those found in newspaper editorials. The students have sufficient mastery of the language to shape their production, both written and spoken, for particular audiences and purposes and to clearly defend or justify a particular point of view.

The four Benchmark Level labels can be remembered by the mnemonic "BETTER" (**BE**ginning, **T**ransitioning, **E**xpanding, and **R**efining).

Language ability assessed by CAP (based on Bachman & Palmer, 1996)

		Beginning	Transitioning	Expanding	Refining
Grammar	Vocabulary	Knowledge of limited number of common words and cognates Graphology	knowledge of some general purpose vocabulary	knowledge of most general purpose vocabulary and common cultural references	knowledge of general purpose and some specialized vocabulary
	Syntax	little productive ability, but may be able to recognize memorized chunks	Familiarity with basic syntactic structures, but not complete accuracy; may be confused by complex structures	Facility with most basic syntactic structures and common complex constructions	Generally able to understand all but the most complex syntactic structures
Text	Cohesion	little or no cohesion	Some knowledge of cohesion, but may be confused by basic relationships	Ability to recognize most common relationships (temporal, sequential, cause and effect, etc.)	able to understand wide range of cohesive devices
	Rhetorical Organization	loose or no structure	loose or clear structure	able to recognize clear, underlying structure	Ability to recognize structure of argument
Pragmatic	Functional?	ability to recognize basic manipulative functions (greetings, commands, etc.)	ability to understand basic manipulative and ideational (descriptions) functions	heuristic (language for learning)	imaginative (language used to create imaginary world, poetry)
	Sociolinguistic	combination of natural and contrived language	combination of natural and contrived language	mainly natural language	Ability to recognize register differences Figures of speech

		Beginning	Transitioning	Expanding	Refining
Topical Knowledge	Not assessed, though students are assumed to have general knowledge of the world				
Strategic Knowledge	Not assessed, though some students may be able to make use of such knowledge, such as test-taking skills				

ᵊFunctional Knowledge – knowledge needed to interpret the intentions of the language user
- Manipulative – using the language to affect the world around us
- Ideational – using language to express or exchange information about ideas, knowledge, or feelings
- Heuristic – using language to extend our knowledge of the world around us (for teaching and/or learning)
- Imaginative – using language to create an imaginary world (jokes, figurative language, etc.)

As the Benchmark levels increase, test-takers are expected to show evidence of increasing language ability, as indicated in the table. Reading and listening tasks in CAP are a combination of a level-appropriate texts and ability-appropriate items.

Topic List

This chart indicates the general topical areas along with a "center of gravity" suggestion of where those topics are most likely to occur. This chart is provided as a guide for thinking about level-appropriate tasks; it is not intended to be followed slavishly. The topic of Stores/Shopping, for example, is <u>most likely</u> to be found in tasks at the Beginning and Transitioning level, but this does not preclude an article lamenting the move away from brick-and-mortar to online retail from being used in a perfectly appropriate Refining level reading task.

TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS	B	T	E	R
Arts/Literature	Fine and performing arts, literature		X	X	X
Calendar/Time	Schedules, calendar, etc.	X	X		
Clothing	Basic clothing items (shirt, skirt, etc)	X			
Community	Community events, recycling, volunteer opportunities, etc.		X	X	
Culture/Contemporary Issues	Pop culture, human interest stories, etc.		X	X	X
Daily Routines	Regular daily routines	X	X		
Economics	Economic news and issues			X	X
Family	Family terms, family activities	X	X		
Food	Basic food and dishes, restaurants, recipes, etc.	X	X		
Friends	Friends, social activities	X	X		
Geography	Directions, names of places, geographical information	X	X		
Health	Body parts, symptoms, health issues	X	X	X	
History	Major events, historical figures		X	X	
Home	Rooms in home, etc.	X	X		
Leisure/Activities	Hobbies, sports, music, weekend activities	X	X		
Math/Science	Math and scientific topics/issues		X	X	X
Occupations	Basic occupations, recent employment trends/issues, etc.		X	X	X
Pets/Animals	Basic animals (cats, dogs, fish, etc)	X	X		
Politics	Election, current issues, etc.			X	X
Religion	Customs, rituals, etc.		X	X	

TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS	B	T	E	R
School	Name of subjects, extracurricular activities	X	X		
Season/Weather	Seasons, temperature, climate, weather forecasts	X	X		
Self	Biographical information, personal characteristics	X	X	X	
Society	Environment, safety, education, etc.		X	X	
Stores/Shopping	Description of merchandise (cheap, large, color, price), vocabulary for shopping (discount, etc)	X	X		
Transportation	Name of transportation (car, train, etc), directions	X	X		
Travel/Vacations	What's in travel brochures such as places to see, history, geography, and local industry		X		
*The level designation is just a general guide					

Reading Task Specifications

This section describes reading items from a *content* point of view. For numbering and editing conventions, please consult the Item Writer's guide.

Features of Texts for Benchmark ranges

Benchmark Level	ILR	ACTFL	Features	Examples
Refining	3	S	Presence of author's voice Complex discourse structure Some knowledge of target culture assumed Sustained opinion or argument	newspaper editorials, movie reviews, political commentaries, excerpts from literature
Expanding	2+ 2	AdvPlus A	Text organized into paragraphs Multiplicity of tenses Factual information presented in a straightforward manner	factual descriptions such as found in newspaper and magazine articles, personal correspondence, routine business correspondence, excerpts from literature
Transitioning	1+ 1	IH IM IL	Simple, connected discourse Primarily informational purpose Focus on "here-and-now"	menus, schedules, simple correspondence, simple descriptions of people and places
Beginning	0+ 0	NH NM NL	Contextual clues (e.g., layout) available Primarily composed of individual words, lists of words, or short phrases Common words Information for immediate use	signs, simple menus, advertisements, short notes, postcards, shopping lists

NOTE:

The examples presented in the table are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive or definitive. For example, though features of Expanding Level texts are often found in newspaper articles, the fact that a given text was found in a newspaper does not automatically make it an Expanding Level text. The grammatical, lexical, and discourse features of the text should also be considered.

Items at the upper end of a range (corresponding to "plus" levels for ILR or "High" levels for ACTFL) will include some elements of the range above, but not enough to classify the text as being in the next range. Thus, a text at the upper end of the Expanding Level may have some evaluative elements, but those will not be sustained throughout the text.

Items at the lower end of a range (corresponding to the "Low" levels for ACTFL) will be minimum examples of texts that are still considered to be at the given level. For example, the presence of many

cognates in a short letter may cause it to be placed at the lower end of the Transitioning Level (ACTFL Intermediate-Low).

Suitable reading texts

Suitable texts for CAP can be found or manufactured. Even in the case of manufactured texts, it is important to start by considering a variety of real-world texts so that the manufactured texts can mimic the features of their real-world counterparts to the extent possible. The example texts in the chart on the previous page and the Core Competency list are suggestive of the types of texts most appropriate for a given level.

Typical text length
Though differences in orthography confound what constitutes a "word" in any given language, the following chart shows the approximate length of texts at various levels.

Beginning: 1 – 30 words
Transitioning: 10 – 100 words
Expanding: 100 – 250 words
Refining: 200 – 300 words

In thinking about the upper end of these ranges, it is preferable to find a text that is naturally shorter than to edit a text, but individual sections of a longer text can also be used. Note also that although text length is <u>a</u> consideration, it is not <u>the</u> overriding consideration – the features of the text must also be appropriate for the level in question. It may be necessary to exceed these suggested ranges to find appropriate texts for some languages. By the same token, just because a text is only a few words long does not automatically make it appropriate for a Beginning level task if the vocabulary load is very high.

Topicality and cultural density
In general, texts should not require specialized background knowledge or cultural knowledge to understand. If the text was written for a general rather than specialized audience, it is probably appropriate. It is also important to avoid texts that focus too much on specific recent events (e.g., the results of a recent election, etc.), as they will become quickly outdated; texts that focus on human interest stories, biographical information, general descriptions or concepts, etc., tend to be better. These suggestions should be treated as guidelines.

Beginning Level Reading Tasks

Text Features

Benchmark Level	ILR	ACTFL	Features	Examples
Beginning	0+	NH	Contextual clues (e.g., layout) available	signs, simple menus, advertisements, short notes, postcards, shopping lists
		NM	Primarily composed of individual words, lists of words, or short phrases	
	0	NL	Common words Information for immediate use	

Language Features

		Beginning
Grammar	Vocabulary	Knowledge of limited number of common words and cognates Graphology
	Syntax	little productive ability, but may be able to recognize memorized chunks
Text	Cohesion	little or no cohesion
	Rhetorical Organization	loose or no structure
Pragmatic	Functional	ability to recognize basic manipulative functions (greetings, commands, etc.)
	Sociolinguistic	combination of natural and contrived language
Topical Knowledge	Not specifically assessed, though students are assumed to have general knowledge of the world	
Strategic Knowledge	Not assessed.	

Beginning Level Task Checklist

Beginning Text Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The purpose of the text is to communicate basic facts without			

commentary		
The text uses simple, everyday vocabulary		
The tone is authoritative		
The information is loosely ordered		
Sentences (if present) are formulaic		
The text is between 1 ~ 30 words		
The topic is appropriate		

Comments:

Beginning Topic List

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Calendar/Time	Schedules, calendar, etc.
	Clothing	Basic clothing items (shirt, skirt, etc)
	Daily Routines	Regular daily routines
	Family	Family terms, family activities
	Food	Basic food and dishes, restaurants, recipes, etc.
	Friends	Friends, social activities
	Geography	Directions, names of places, geographical information
	Health	Body parts, symptoms, health issues
	Home	Rooms in home, etc.
	Leisure/Activities	Hobbies, sports, music, weekend activities
	Pets/Animals	Basic animals (cats, dogs, fish, etc)
	School	Name of subjects, extracurricular activities
	Season/Weather	Seasons, temperature, climate, weather forecasts
	Self	Biographical information, personal characteristics
	Stores/Shopping	Description of merchandise (cheap, large, color, price), vocabulary for shopping (discount, etc)
	Transportation	Name of transportation (car, train, etc), directions

Beginning Task Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The task represents a natural, everyday activity			
The task does not require cultural knowledge			
The task does not require inference			
The task is supported by context			
The task incorporates a core competency			

Comments:

Beginning Core Competency Tasks

	Identify the cost of an item from a simple menu
	Recognize which section of a form is asking for basic personal information
	Understand a basic store or building information guide (e.g., Men's wear - 2nd Floor, etc.)
	Read a simple class schedule to identify the next class
	Identify which train to take from a train schedule
	Identify the season based on a simple weather forecast (or Match a simple weather description with a picture)
	Identify the rooms of a house on a simple floor plan
	Read a sales receipt and determine a season or event for which clothes were purchased
	Understand common names of buildings on a simple map
	Read common road signs
	Read a shopping list and determine the type of store one needs to visit to purchase those items
	Read a list of common foods and be able to identify one high frequency word

Note: These core competencies are intended as suggestions only. Depending on the language, some of these may involve proficiency beyond what is reasonably expected at the Beginning level.

Transitioning Level Reading Tasks

Text Features

Benchmark Level	ILR	ACTFL	Features	Examples
Transitioning	1+	IH	Simple, connected discourse Primarily informational purpose Focus on "here-and-now"	menus, schedules, simple correspondence, simple descriptions of people and places
		IM		
	1	IL		

Language Features

		Transitioning
Grammar	Vocabulary	knowledge of some general purpose vocabulary
	Syntax	Familiarity with basic syntactic structures, but not complete accuracy; may be confused by complex structures
Text	Cohesion	Some knowledge of cohesion, but may be confused by basic relationships
	Rhetorical Organization	loose or clear structure
Pragmatic	Functional	ability to understand basic manipulative and ideational (descriptions) functions
	Sociolinguistic	combination of natural and contrived language
Topical Knowledge	Not assessed, though test takers are expected to have general understanding of the world.	
Strategic Knowledge	Not assessed.	

Transitioning Level Task Checklist

Transitioning Text Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The purpose of the text is to communicate basic facts without commentary			
The text uses simple, everyday vocabulary			
The text features simple, everyday prose			
The tone is authoritative			
The information is loosely ordered*			
The text is between 10 ~ 100 words.			
The topic is appropriate			

Comments:

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Calendar/Time	Schedules, calendar, etc.
	Clothing	Basic clothing items (shirt, skirt, etc)
	Community	Community events, recycling, volunteer opportunities, etc.
	Culture/Contemporary Issues	Pop culture, human interest stories, etc.
	Daily Routines	Regular daily routines
	Family	Family terms, family activities
	Food	Basic food and dishes, restaurants, recipes, etc.
	Friends	Friends, social activities
	Geography	Directions, names of places, geographical information
	Health	Body parts, symptoms, health issues
	History	Major events, historical figures
	Home	Rooms in home, etc.
	Leisure/Activities	Hobbies, sports, music, weekend activities
	Math/Science	Math and scientific topics/issues

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Occupations	Basic occupations, recent employment trends/issues, etc.
	Pets/Animals	Basic animals (cats, dogs, fish, etc)
	Religion	Customs, rituals, etc.
	School	Name of subjects, extracurricular activities
	Season/Weather	Seasons, temperature, climate, weather forecasts
	Self	Biographical information, personal characteristics
	Society	Environment, safety, education, etc.
	Stores/Shopping	Description of merchandise (cheap, large, color, price), vocabulary for shopping (discount, etc)
	Transportation	Name of transportation (car, train, etc), directions
	Travel/Vacations	What's in travel brochures such as places to see, history, geography, and local industry

Transitioning Task Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The task represents a natural, everyday activity			
The task does not require cultural knowledge			
The task does not require inference			
The task requires some syntactic knowledge			
The task is supported by context			
The task incorporates a core competency			

Comments:

Transitioning Core Competency Tasks

	Understand simple memo (e.g., XX telephoned)
	Understand simple directions (e.g., driving)
	Understand short and simple emails, letters, journal entries,
	Determine the class subject from a student's class notes
	Identify the theme of an advertisement (either from a Web site, a newspaper, or a brochure)

Expanding Level Reading Tasks

Text Features

Benchmark Level	ILR	ACTFL	Features	Examples
Expanding	2+	AdvPlus	Text organized into paragraphs Multiplicity of tenses Factual information presented in a straightforward manner	factual descriptions such as found in newspaper and magazine articles, personal correspondence, routine business correspondence, excerpts from literature
	2	A		

Language Features

		Expanding
Grammar	Vocabulary	knowledge of most general purpose vocabulary and common cultural references
	Syntax	Facility with most basic syntactic structures and common complex constructions
Text	Cohesion	Ability to recognize most common relationships (temporal, sequential, cause and effect, etc.)
	Rhetorical Organization	able to recognize clear, underlying structure
Pragmatic	Functional?	heuristic (language for learning)
	Sociolinguistic	mainly natural language
Topical Knowledge	Not assessed, though test takers are expected to have general understanding of the world.	
Strategic Knowledge	Not assessed.	

Expanding Level Task Checklist

Expanding Text Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The text's purpose is to inform, in some detail, without commentary*			
The text uses primarily common, rather than specialized, vocabulary			
The text features a variety of syntactic structures and time frames			
The tone is primarily declarative			
The text has a clear discourse structure (e.g., main ideas and supporting facts)			
The text is not dependent on external cues			
The topic is appropriate			
The text is between 100 – 250 words			

Comments:

Expanding Topic List

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Arts/Literature	Fine and performing arts, literature
	Community	Community events, recycling, volunteer opportunities, etc.
	Culture/Contemporary Issues	Pop culture, human interest stories, etc.
	Economics	Economic news and issues
	Health	Body parts, symptoms, health issues
	History	Major events, historical figures
	Math/Science	Math and scientific topics/issues
	Occupations	Basic occupations, recent employment trends/issues, etc.
	Politics	Election, current issues, etc.
	Religion	Customs, rituals, etc.
	Self	Biographical information, personal characteristics

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Society	Environment, safety, education, etc.

Expanding Task Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The task represents a reasonable reading activity			
The task does not require extensive cultural knowledge			
The task requires understanding information from more than one clause			
The task incorporates a core competency			

Comments:

Expanding Core Competency Tasks

	Understand biographical information
	Get general information from travel brochures
	Get the gist and some facts from news items

Refining Level Reading Tasks

Text Features

Benchmark Level	ILR	ACTFL	Features	Examples
Refining	3	S	Presence of author's voice Complex discourse structure Some knowledge of target culture assumed Sustained opinion or argument	newspaper editorials, movie reviews, political commentaries, excerpts from literature

Language Features

		Refining
Grammar	Vocabulary	knowledge of general purpose and some specialized vocabulary
	Syntax	Generally able to understand all but the most complex syntactic structures
Text	Cohesion	able to understand wide range of cohesive devices
	Rhetorical Organization	Ability to recognize structure of argument
Pragmatic	Functional?	imaginative (language used to create imaginary world, poetry)
	Sociolinguistic	Ability to recognize register differences Figures of speech
Topical Knowledge	Not assessed	
Strategic Knowledge	Not assessed.	

Refining Level Task Checklist

Refining Text Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The purpose of the text is to persuade or examine			
The vocabulary is precise and varied			
The text features a variety of syntactic structures and time frames			
The text includes commentary			
The author's tone is present			
The topic is appropriate			
The text is 200 - 300 words long			

Comments:

Refining Topic List

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Arts/Literature	Fine and performing arts, literature
	Culture/Contemporary Issues	Pop culture, human interest stories, etc.
	Economics	Economic news and issues
	Math/Science	Math and scientific topics/issues
	Occupations	Basic occupations, recent employment trends/issues, etc.
	Politics	Election, current issues, etc.
	Religion	Customs, rituals, etc.
	Society	Environment, safety, education, etc.

Refining Task Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The task requires the understanding of multi-clausal portions of the text			
The task does not require extensive cultural knowledge			
The task requires the understanding of an unstated proposition			
The task incorporates a core competency			

Comments:

Refining Core Competency Tasks

	Read editorials and follow the argument	
	Understand hypothesis	
	Understand author's intent and tone of voice	

Listening Task Specifications

This section describes listening items from a *content* point of view. For numbering and editing conventions, please consult the Item Writer's guide.

Features of Listening Texts for Benchmark ranges

Benchmark Level	ILR	ACTFL	Features	Examples
Refining	3	S	Main purpose is persuasion; analysis, or commentary Complex discourse Implication-rich text	speeches; new stories with supported opinion; interviews including opinion or analyse; Some regional dialects
Expanding	2+ 2	AdvPlus A	Factual information presented in a straightforward manner Statements explicitly connected General vocabulary Minimal commentary	news reports of factual events; simple descriptions of people, events, or situation general news reports; interviews about events
Transitioning	1+ 1	IH IM IL	Simple, connected discourse Primarily informational purpose Focus on "here-and-now" Everyday vocabulary	simple directions, public service announcements, weather reports, simple radio advertisements, basic conversations, Simple narratives about concrete topics
Beginning	0+ 0	NH NM NL	Purpose to provide basic information Single words or short phrases strongly supported by context Concrete vocabulary Minimally connected discourse	Short, simple, even formulaic utterances Introductions and basic transactions Everyday greetings Simple announcements

The examples presented in the table are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive or definitive. For example, though features of Expanding Level texts are often found in news reports, the fact that a given text is from a news source does not automatically make it an Expanding Level text. The grammatical, lexical, and discourse features of the text should also be considered.

Items at the upper end of a range (corresponding to "plus" levels for ILR or "High" levels for ACTFL) will include some elements of the range above, but not enough to classify the text as being in the next range. Thus, a text at the upper end of the Expanding Level may have some evaluative elements, but those will not be sustained throughout the text.

Items at the lower end of a range (corresponding to the "Low" levels for ACTFL) will be minimum examples of texts that are still considered to be at the given level. For example, the presence of many cognates in a short conversation may cause it to be placed at the lower end of the Transitioning Level

(ACTFL Intermediate-Low).

Suitable listening texts

Authenticity
Suitable texts for CAP can be found or manufactured. At the Expanding and Refining level, it should be possible to use mostly real-world texts. However, at the Beginning and Transitioning level, it is difficult to find and use naturally occurring speech. When creating scripts, it is important to reference authentic conversation so that the scripted texts mimic the features of their real-world counterparts to the extent possible. For example, most spoken texts have a great deal of redundancy. The example texts in the chart on the previous page and the Core Competency list are suggestive of the types of texts most appropriate for a given level. It is also possible to record semi-scripted conversations between native speakers in which the general situation is agreed to before hand, but the actual words are not scripted.

Sound quality
It is virtually impossible to have pristine sound quality for many authentic texts. However, sound quality should never be so poor that even native speakers have to strain to catch what is being said. The following can be detrimental to sound quality:
- intrusive background music
- muffled voices
- "voice overs" of material that is in another language (especially English)
- background noises

An authentic text can be transcribed and rerecorded if sound quality is sub par.

Number of speakers
If possible, no more than two speakers should be present in any text. When two speakers are present, it is preferable to have one male and one female voice, as it is easier for the listener to distinguish between them. If that is not possible, it is important to ensure that the task does not require the listener to "keep track" of who is talking except for very straight-forward interactions (e.g., shopkeeper and customer, etc.).

Typical text length
Because test takers are not allowed to takes notes while listening, it is important that the effects of memory be minimized. The following are appropriate lengths for listening texts:

Beginning: up to 30 seconds
Transitioning: up to 60 seconds
Expanding: up to 90 seconds
Refining: up to 120 seconds

In thinking about the upper end of these ranges, it is preferable to find a text that is naturally shorter than to edit a text, but individual sections of a longer text can be used if they are sufficiently "self-contained" (e.g., do not refer back to unheard portions, etc.). Note also that although text length is a consideration, it is not the overriding consideration – the features of the text must also be appropriate for the level in question. It may be necessary to exceed these suggested ranges to find appropriate texts

for some languages. By the same token, just because a text is very short does not automatically make it appropriate for a Beginning level task if the vocabulary load is very high.

Topicality and cultural density
In general, texts should not require specialized background knowledge or cultural knowledge to understand. If the text was produced for a general rather than specialized audience, it is probably appropriate. It is also important to avoid texts that focus too much on specific recent events (e.g., the results of a recent election, etc.), as they will become quickly outdated; texts that focus on human interest stories, biographical information, general descriptions or concepts, etc., tend to be better. These suggestions should be treated as guidelines.

Beginning Level Listening Tasks

Beginning Level Listening Text Features

Benchmark Level	ILR	ACTFL	Features	Examples
Beginning	0+	NH	Purpose to provide basic information	Short, simple, even formulaic utterances
		NM	Single words or short phrases strongly supported by context Concrete vocabulary Minimally connected discourse	Introductions and basic transactions Everyday greetings Simple announcements
	0	NL		

Beginning Level Language Features

		Beginning
Grammar	Vocabulary	Knowledge of limited number of common words and cognates
	Syntax	little productive ability, but may be able to recognize memorized chunks
Text	Cohesion	little or no cohesion
	Rhetorical Organization	loose or no structure
Pragmatic	Functional	ability to recognize basic manipulative functions (greetings, commands, etc.)
	Sociolinguistic	combination of natural and contrived language
Topical Knowledge	Not specifically assessed, though students are assumed to have general knowledge of the world	
Strategic Knowledge	Not assessed.	

Beginning Level Task Checklist

Beginning Level Listening Text Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The purpose of the text is informational			
The text uses simple, everyday			

vocabulary			
The text consists of simple words or phrases			
The text sounds authentic			
There are no more than two voices			
The audio is reasonably clear			
The text is 30 seconds or less			
The topic is appropriate			

Comments:

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Calendar/Time	Schedules, calendar, etc.
	Clothing	Basic clothing items (shirt, skirt, etc)
	Daily Routines	Regular daily routines
	Family	Family terms, family activities
	Food	Basic food and dishes, restaurants, recipes, etc.
	Friends	Friends, social activities
	Geography	Directions, names of places, geographical information
	Health	Body parts, symptoms, health issues
	Home	Rooms in home, etc.
	Leisure/Activities	Hobbies, sports, music, weekend activities
	Pets/Animals	Basic animals (cats, dogs, fish, etc)
	School	Name of subjects, extracurricular activities
	Season/Weather	Seasons, temperature, climate, weather forecasts
	Self	Biographical information, personal characteristics
	Stores/Shopping	Description of merchandise (cheap, large, color, price), vocabulary for shopping (discount, etc)
	Transportation	Name of transportation (car, train, etc), directions

Beginning Level Listening Task Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The task represents a natural, everyday activity			
The task does not require cultural knowledge			
The task does not require inference			
The task is supported by context			
The task incorporates a core competency			

Comments:

Beginning Level Listening Core Competency Tasks

	Recognize a basic request for personal information (e.g., "What is your name?")
	Understand basic school instructions (e.g., Take out a piece of paper.)
	Understand speakers who express quantity from 0 to 20 (e.g. "What time is it?" "It is 10 PM.")

Note: These core competencies are intended as suggestions only. Depending on the language, some of these may involve proficiency beyond what is reasonably expected at the Transitioning level.

Transitioning Level Listening Tasks

Transitioning Level Listening Text Features

Benchmark Level	ILR	ACTFL	Features	Examples
Transitioning	1+ 1	IH IM IL	Simple, connected discourse Primarily informational purpose Focus on "here-and-now" Everyday vocabulary	simple directions, public service announcements, weather reports, simple radio advertisements, basic conversations, Simple narratives about concrete topics

Transitioning Level Language Features

		Transitioning
Grammar	Vocabulary	knowledge of some general purpose vocabulary
	Syntax	Familiarity with basic syntactic structures, but not complete accuracy; may be confused by complex structures
Text	Cohesion	Some knowledge of cohesion, but may be confused by basic relationships
	Rhetorical Organization	loose or clear structure
Pragmatic	Functional	ability to understand basic manipulative and ideational (descriptions) functions
	Sociolinguistic	combination of natural and contrived language
Topical Knowledge	Not assessed, though test takers are expected to have general understanding of the world.	
Strategic Knowledge	Not assessed.	

Transitioning Level Task Checklist

Transitioning Level Listening Text Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The purpose of the text is informational			
The text uses simple, everyday vocabulary			
The text sounds authentic			
There are no more than two voices			
The audio is reasonably clear			
The text is 60 seconds or less			
The topic is appropriate			

Comments:

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Calendar/Time	Schedules, calendar, etc.
	Clothing	Basic clothing items (shirt, skirt, etc)
	Community	Community events, recycling, volunteer opportunities, etc.
	Culture/Contemporary Issues	Pop culture, human interest stories, etc.
	Daily Routines	Regular daily routines
	Family	Family terms, family activities
	Food	Basic food and dishes, restaurants, recipes, etc.
	Friends	Friends, social activities
	Geography	Directions, names of places, geographical information
	Health	Body parts, symptoms, health issues
	History	Major events, historical figures
	Home	Rooms in home, etc.
	Leisure/Activities	Hobbies, sports, music, weekend activities
	Math/Science	Math and scientific topics/issues
	Occupations	Basic occupations, recent employment trends/issues, etc.

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Pets/Animals	Basic animals (cats, dogs, fish, etc)
	Religion	Customs, rituals, etc.
	School	Name of subjects, extracurricular activities
	Season/Weather	Seasons, temperature, climate, weather forecasts
	Self	Biographical information, personal characteristics
	Society	Environment, safety, education, etc.
	Stores/Shopping	Description of merchandise (cheap, large, color, price), vocabulary for shopping (discount, etc)
	Transportation	Name of transportation (car, train, etc), directions
	Travel/Vacations	What's in travel brochures such as places to see, history, geography, and local industry

Listening Task Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The task represents a natural, everyday activity			
The task does not require cultural knowledge			
The task does not require inference			
The task requires some syntactic knowledge			
The task is supported by context			
The task incorporates a core competency			

Comments:

Core Competencies for Transitioning Level Listening

	Understand speakers who express quantity from 0 to 100 (e.g. "Hello. How much is a ticket to Bordeaux? Tickets on the morning trains are 83 Euros, and the two trains in the evening are 74 Euros.")
	Understand simple oral directions to a location (e.g. "Turn right at the corner and go down three streets. Turn left by the post office.")
	Understand simple instructions outside of the school domain (e.g. Marie's employer tells her: "Please make the beds, clean the kitchen, and then mop the floors. If you have time, you can fold the laundry.")

Expanding Level Listening Tasks

Expanding Level Listening Text Features

Benchmark Level	ILR	ACTFL	Features	Examples
Expanding	2+ 2	AdvPlus A	Factual information presented in a straightforward manner Statements explicitly connected General vocabulary Minimal commentary	news reports of factual events; simple descriptions of people, events, or situations; general news reports; interviews about events

Expanding Level Language Features

		Expanding
Grammar	Vocabulary	knowledge of most general purpose vocabulary and common cultural references
	Syntax	Facility with most basic syntactic structures and common complex constructions
Text	Cohesion	Ability to recognize most common relationships (temporal, sequential, cause and effect, etc.)
	Rhetorical Organization	able to recognize clear, underlying structure
Pragmatic	Functional?	heuristic (language for learning)
	Sociolinguistic	mainly natural language
Topical Knowledge	Not assessed, though test takers are expected to have general understanding of the world.	
Strategic Knowledge	Not assessed.	

Expanding Level Task Checklist

Expanding Level Listening Text Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The text's purpose is to inform, in some detail, without commentary*			
The text uses primarily common, rather than specialized, vocabulary			
The text is explicitly connected			
The text sounds authentic			
There are no more than two voices			
The audio is reasonably clear			
The text is 60 seconds or less			

Comments:

Expanding Level Topic List

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Arts/Literature	Fine and performing arts, literature
	Community	Community events, recycling, volunteer opportunities, etc.
	Culture/Contemporary Issues	Pop culture, human interest stories, etc.
	Economics	Economic news and issues
	Health	Body parts, symptoms, health issues
	History	Major events, historical figures
	Math/Science	Math and scientific topics/issues
	Occupations	Basic occupations, recent employment trends/issues, etc.
	Politics	Election, current issues, etc.
	Religion	Customs, rituals, etc.
	Self	Biographical information, personal characteristics
	Society	Environment, safety, education, etc.

Expanding Level Listening Task Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The task represents a reasonable listening activity			
The task does not require extensive cultural knowledge			
The task requires understanding information from more than one clause			
The task incorporates a core competency			

Comments:

Expanding Level Listening Core Competency Tasks

	Understand biographical information
	Get general information from news reports
	Understand general conversation

Refining Level Listening Tasks

Refining Level Listening Text Features

Benchmark Level	ILR	ACTFL	Features	Examples
Refining	3	S	Presence of author's voice Complex discourse structure Some knowledge of target culture assumed Sustained opinion or argument	newspaper editorials, movie reviews, political commentaries, excerpts from literature

Refining Level Language Features

		Refining
Grammar	Vocabulary	knowledge of general purpose and some specialized vocabulary
	Syntax	Generally able to understand all but the most complex syntactic structures
Text	Cohesion	able to understand wide range of cohesive devices
	Rhetorical Organization	Ability to recognize structure of argument
Pragmatic	Functional?	imaginative (language used to create imaginary world, poetry)
	Sociolinguistic	Ability to recognize register differences Figures of speech
Topical Knowledge	Not assessed	
Strategic Knowledge	Not assessed.	

Refining Level Task Checklist

Refining Text Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The purpose of the text is to persuade or examine			
The vocabulary is precise and varied			
The text features a variety of syntactic structures and time frames			
The speaker's opinion is present			
There are no more than 2 voices			
The audio quality is acceptable			
The topic is appropriate			
The text is less than 120 seconds long			

Comments:

Refining Topic List

	TOPIC	SAMPLE SUBTOPICS
	Arts/Literature	Fine and performing arts, literature
	Culture/Contemporary Issues	Pop culture, human interest stories, etc.
	Economics	Economic news and issues
	Math/Science	Math and scientific topics/issues
	Occupations	Basic occupations, recent employment trends/issues, etc.
	Politics	Election, current issues, etc.
	Religion	Customs, rituals, etc.
	Society	Environment, safety, education, etc.

Refining Task Characteristics

Criteria	Yes	No	Notes
The task requires the understanding of multi-clausal portions of the text			
The task does not require extensive cultural knowledge			
The task requires the understanding of an unstated proposition			
The task incorporates a core competency			

Comments:

Refining Core Competency Tasks

Speaking Task Specifications

This section describes speaking items from a *content* point of view. For numbering and editing conventions, please consult the Item Writer's guide.

Core competencies

Unlike reading and listening, where the features of the text are a primary factor in task development, speaking prompts require an understanding of the core competencies desired for each level.

Level	Core Competency
Refining	Explain a complex process in detail Describe a complex object in detail Propose and defend a course of action with persuasion State personal points of view on a controversial subject Explain a complex process of a personal nature Evaluate issues surrounding a conflict
Expanding	Give instructions Describe a sequence of events in the past Describe a habitual action in the past Talk about future plans Lodge a complaint Express personal apologies Give advice Compare and contrast two objects or places State advantages and disadvantages
Transitioning	Ask appropriately for common objects when shopping Order a meal in a restaurant Describe a daily routine Ask basic questions
Beginning	Identify common objects Give a simple self-introduction

The relationship between speaking prompts and Benchmark levels

Suitable speaking prompts are those which have the capacity to elicit an appropriate sample of language for a given level. At the same time, they should allow for more competent test takers to demonstrate their ability to the extent possible.

Writing Task Specifications

This section describes writing items from a *content* point of view. For numbering and editing conventions, please consult the Item Writer's guide.

Writing Core Competencies

Unlike reading and listening, where the features of the text are a primary factor in task development, writing prompts require an understanding of the core competencies desired for each level.

Level	Core Competency
Refining	Develop a persuasive argument Present and support an opinion Explain complex matters in detail Construct an extended conjecture (e.g., "What would happen if...")
Expanding	Produce routine social correspondence Write about familiar topics Describe a current event Develop a simple argument
Transitioning	Describe a personal preference Describe a daily routine Describe a common event Describe a familiar location
Beginning	Make a simple list Produce memorized material (e.g., self introduction, etc.)

The relationship between writing prompts and Benchmark levels

Suitable writing prompts are those which have the capacity to elicit an appropriate sample of language for a given level. At the same time, they should allow for more competent test takers to demonstrate their ability to the extent possible.