

Performance Definitions for the Levels of English Language Proficiency in Grades K-12

At the given level of English language proficiency, English language learners will process, understand, produce, or use:

6 Reaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> specialized or technical language reflective of the content areas at grade level a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in extended oral or written discourse as required by the specified grade level oral or written communication in English comparable to English-proficient peers
5 Bridging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> specialized or technical language of the content areas a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in extended oral or written discourse, including stories, essays, or reports oral or written language approaching comparability to that of English-proficient peers when presented with grade-level material
4 Expanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> specific and some technical language of the content areas a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in oral discourse or multiple, related sentences, or paragraphs oral or written language with minimal phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that do not impede the overall meaning of the communication when presented with oral or written connected discourse with sensory, graphic, or interactive support
3 Developing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> general and some specific language of the content areas expanded sentences in oral interaction or written paragraphs oral or written language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that may impede the communication, but retain much of its meaning, when presented with oral or written, narrative, or expository descriptions with sensory, graphic, or interactive support
2 Beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> general language related to the content areas phrases or short sentences oral or written language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that often impede the meaning of the communication when presented with one- to multiple-step commands, directions, questions, or a series of statements with sensory, graphic, or interactive support
1 Entering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pictorial or graphic representation of the language of the content areas words, phrases, or chunks of language when presented with one-step commands, directions, WH-, choice, or yes/no questions, or statements with sensory, graphic, or interactive support oral language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that often impede meaning when presented with basic oral commands, direct questions, or simple statements with sensory, graphic, or interactive support

WIDA® Grade Level Cluster Can Do Descriptors

The grade level cluster Can Do Descriptors have been created by teachers, primarily for teachers, who work with English language learners throughout the consortium. During 2007-08, over 900 teachers and administrators participated in refining and validating five grade level clusters of Descriptors from the original document spanning the K-12 spectrum. These Descriptors for the four language domains—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and five levels of English language proficiency are based on the WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards.

Interpretation of the Can Do Descriptors

To maintain the succinctness of the individual statements, some basic assumptions need to be made in interpreting the Can Do Descriptors.

1. Sensory, graphic, or interactive support are present through language proficiency level 4, Expanding.
2. English language learners can process or produce the **language** associated with the stated language functions.
3. Linguistic complexity, vocabulary usage, and language control increase incrementally as students move from one English language proficiency level to the next.

The Can Do Descriptors are a sampling of the language expectations of English language learners as they travel along the continuum of English language development. Unlike the strands of model performance indicators that scaffold across levels of language proficiency, the Can Do Descriptors function independently within a given level of language proficiency.

Uses for the Can Do Descriptors

The Can Do Descriptors are a resource, in addition to the English language proficiency standards, to use in classrooms with English language learners. As an instructional assessment tool, language teachers may:

- Share the Descriptors with classroom teachers and administrators to describe the second language acquisition process around the levels of English language proficiency
- Provide resource teachers, such as Title I or literacy coaches, additional information about English language learners
- Use to plan with tutors or mentors who work with English language learners
- Develop or co-develop lessons and units of study with differentiated language objectives
- Set language goals with their English language learners*
- Explain to parents students' progress in listening, speaking, reading, and writing*
- Suggest language goals to be incorporated into Individual Education Programs (IEPs) for English language learners with diagnosed disabilities
- Translate English language proficiency test scores (i.e., ACCESS for ELLs®, W-APT™, and WIDA MODEL™) into classroom practice
- Observe and note levels of student performance as a precursor to using WIDA Speaking and Writing Rubrics for formative assessment
- Use the Descriptors to advocate on behalf of English language learners

** For these uses, the Can Do Descriptors are also available in Spanish on pp. 8-11 of this booklet.*

Can Do Descriptors: Grade Level Cluster 9-12

For the given level of English language proficiency and with visual, graphic, or interactive support through Level 4, English language learners can process or produce the **language** needed to:

Level 1 Entering	Level 2 Beginning	Level 3 Developing	Level 4 Expanding	Level 5 Bridging	Level 6 - Reaching
LISTENING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Point to or show basic parts, components, features, characteristics, and properties of objects, organisms, or persons named orally Match everyday oral information to pictures, diagrams, or photographs Group visuals by common traits named orally (e.g., "These are polygons.") Identify resources, places, products, figures from oral statements, and visuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Match or classify oral descriptions to real-life experiences or visually-represented, content-related examples Sort oral language statements according to time frames Sequence visuals according to oral directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate information in social and academic conversations Distinguish main ideas from supporting points in oral, content-related discourse Use learning strategies described orally Categorize content-based examples described orally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distinguish between multiple meanings of oral words or phrases in social and academic contexts Analyze content-related tasks or assignments based on oral discourse Categorize examples of genres read aloud Compare traits based on visuals and oral descriptions using specific and some technical language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpret cause and effect scenarios from oral discourse Make inferences from oral discourse containing satire, sarcasm, or humor Identify and react to subtle differences in speech and register (e.g., hyperbolic, satire, comedy) Evaluate intent of speech and act accordingly 	
SPEAKING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answer yes/no or choice questions within context of lessons or personal experiences Provide identifying information about self Name everyday objects and pre-taught vocabulary Repeat words, short phrases, memorized chunks of language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe persons, places, events, or objects Ask WH- questions to clarify meaning Give features of content-based material (e.g., time periods) Characterize issues, situations, regions shown in illustrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggest ways to resolve issues or pose solutions Compare/contrast features, traits, characteristics using general and some specific language Sequence processes, cycles, procedures, or events Conduct interviews or gather information through oral interaction Estimate, make predictions or pose hypotheses from models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a stance and use evidence to defend it Explain content-related issues and concepts Compare and contrast points of view Analyze and share pros and cons of choices Use and respond to gossip, slang, and idiomatic expressions Use speaking strategies (e.g., circumlocution) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give multimedia oral presentations on grade-level material Engage in debates on content-related issues using technical language Explain metacognitive strategies for solving problems (e.g., "Tell me how you know it.") Negotiate meaning in pairs or group discussions 	

The Can Do Descriptors work in conjunction with the WIDA Performance Definitions of the English language proficiency standards. The Performance Definitions use three criteria (1. linguistic complexity; 2. vocabulary usage; and 3. language control) to describe the increasing quality and quantity of students' language processing and use across the levels of language proficiency.

Can Do Descriptors: Grade Level Cluster 9-12

For the given level of English language proficiency and with visual, graphic, or interactive support through Level 4, English language learners can process or produce the language needed to:

Level 1 Entering	Level 2 Beginning	Level 3 Developing	Level 4 Expanding	Level 5 Bridging	Level 6 - Reaching
READING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Match visual representations to words/phrases Read everyday signs, symbols, schedules, and school-related words/phrases Respond to WH- questions related to illustrated text Use references (e.g., picture dictionaries, bilingual glossaries, technology) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Match data or information with its source or genre (e.g., description of element to its symbol on periodic table) Classify or organize information presented in visuals or graphs Follow multi-step instructions supported by visuals or data Match sentence-level descriptions to visual representations Compare content-related features in visuals and graphics Locate main ideas in a series of related sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply multiple meanings of words/phrases to social and academic contexts Identify topic sentences or main ideas and details in paragraphs Answer questions about explicit information in texts Differentiate between fact and opinion in text Order paragraphs or sequence information within paragraphs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare/contrast authors' points of view, characters, information, or events Interpret visually- or graphically-supported information Infer meaning from text Match cause to effect Evaluate usefulness of data or information supported visually or graphically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpret grade-level literature Synthesize grade-level expository text Draw conclusions from different sources of informational text Infer significance of data or information in grade-level material Identify evidence of bias and credibility of source 	Level 6 - Reaching
WRITING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Label content-related diagrams, pictures from word/phrase banks Provide personal information on forms read orally Produce short answer responses to oral questions with visual support Supply missing words in short sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make content-related lists of words, phrases, or expressions Take notes using graphic organizers or models Formulate yes/no, choice and WH- questions from models Correspond for social purposes (e.g., memos, e-mails, notes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete reports from templates Compose short narrative and expository pieces Outline ideas and details using graphic organizers Compare and reflect on performance against criteria (e.g., rubrics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize content-related notes from lectures or text Revise work based on narrative or oral feedback Compose narrative and expository text for a variety of purposes Justify or defend ideas and opinions Produce content-related reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce research reports from multiple sources Create original pieces that represent the use of a variety of genres and discourses Critique, peer-edit and make recommendations on others' writing from rubrics Explain, with details, phenomena, processes, procedures 	

The Can Do Descriptors work in conjunction with the WIDA Performance Definitions of the English language proficiency standards. The Performance Definitions use three criteria (1. linguistic complexity; 2. vocabulary usage; and 3. language control) to describe the increasing quality and quantity of students' language processing and use across the levels of language proficiency.

Table 2. Transitional language classification recommendations based on ACCESS for ELLs results (except ELL students in Kindergarten)

ACCESS for ELLs Overall (or Composite) Score	Language Classification Recommendations
Level 1 – <i>Entering</i> Level 2 – <i>Emerging</i> Level 3 – <i>Developing</i>	Students performing at Levels 1–3 require significant support to access content area instruction delivered in English. Such students should remain classified as ELLs.
Level 4 – <i>Expanding</i>	<p>Students performing at Level 4 typically require continued linguistic and instructional supports to access content area instruction delivered in English. Nevertheless, some Level 4 students may be ready for reclassification if they meet the following two criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) scored at least <i>Proficient</i> (240) on the MCAS ELA test; b) demonstrate the ability to perform ordinary class work in English, as indicated by one or more of the measures listed on <i>Other Relevant Data</i> (described below).
Level 5 – <i>Bridging</i>	<p>Students performing at Level 5 may have acquired enough English language skills to be considered English proficient. Level 5 students who meet the following criteria should no longer be classified as ELLs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) earning an Overall Composite score of at least 5, and Reading and Writing scores of at least 4 on ACCESS for ELLs; b) demonstrate the ability to perform ordinary class work in English, as indicated by one or more of the measures listed on <i>Other Relevant Data</i> (described below). <p>However, increasingly complex and varied language demands on ELLs in late elementary, middle, and high school may support the decision by school-based teams to maintain the ELL classification of a Level 5 student.</p>
Level 6 – <i>Reaching</i>	By the time a student reaches Level 6, he or she should no longer be classified as an ELL. Students in Level 6 have achieved English language proficiency comparable to that of their English- proficient peers functioning at the “proficient” level in state assessments and can be expected to perform ordinary class work in English.

In most cases, it is recommended that students designated as ELL in pre-school and kindergarten continue to be designated as ELL until they complete grade 1 (at minimum), in order to gather more substantial data on their literacy skills and other data needed to support a reclassification decision.

Table 3. Recommended hours of instruction for ELLs based on ACCESS for ELLs results (full-day Kindergarten through grade 12)

ACCESS for ELLs Overall (Composite) Score	Recommended Minimum Hours of ESL Instruction	Recommended Hours of Sheltered Content Instruction	Recommended Hours for Specials/Electives (e.g., physical education, art, music)
Entering (Level 1) and Emerging (Level 2)	2.5 hours per day to a full day of direct ESL instruction, delivered by a licensed ESL teacher.	Other hours as available outside of ESL instruction, delivered by a teacher qualified to teach ELLs ¹⁰ and licensed in the appropriate content area.	The same hours of instruction as former ELLs and native English speaking grade-level peers.
Developing (Level 3)	1-2 hours per day of direct ESL instruction, delivered by a licensed ESL teacher.	ELA or Reading instruction, delivered by a teacher qualified to teach ELLs.	
Expanding (Level 4)	2.5 hours of direct ESL instruction per week, delivered by a licensed ESL teacher.	Other hours as available for math, science and social studies instruction, delivered by a teacher qualified to teach ELLs.	
Bridging (Level 5)	2.5 hours of direct ESL instruction per week, delivered by a licensed ESL teacher.	The same hours of content area instruction as native English speaking peers delivered by a teacher qualified to teach ELLs and licensed in the appropriate content area.	
Reaching (Level 6)	Students at Level 6 should no longer be classified as ELLs and should participate in the general education program alongside native English speaking peers. Their progress must be monitored for two years after their ELL classification was removed. Such students should also receive additional supports and services if needed.		

Half-day Kindergarten and Pre-School Students

For students enrolled in half-day Kindergarten programs, the hours of ESL and sheltered content instruction should be proportional to those outlined on Table 3. For an “entering”-level student, this would translate into approximately 1.25 hours to a full day of ESL instruction delivered by a licensed ESL teacher, and other hours as available for sheltered content area instruction delivered by a teacher qualified to teach ELLs¹¹ and licensed in the appropriate content area.

¹⁰ Core academic teachers must possess an ESL license or hold the SEI Endorsement to be qualified as teachers of ELLs (for more information, see previous footnote 4). This applies throughout levels 1 through 5.

¹¹ See footnote 4.