

Performance-Based Curricula and Outcomes
The Mainstream English Language Training Project (MELT)
Updated for the 1990s and Beyond

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The Student Performance Levels (SPLs)

The Student Performance Levels document provides standard descriptions of adult refugee students' ability at a range of levels. They provide a common standard for refugee ESL level descriptions for use by programs nationwide and fill a long-felt need for a vehicle to facilitate understanding of abilities within a single ESL program and between programs. The SPLs also provide a basis for meaningful communication with providers of other services to refugees (resettlement, job placement, etc.) and within funding sources.

The SPLs are stated in levels of 0 - 10, with 0 representing no English and 10 representing native or near native speech. In the current document, 0 - 5 are represented (0 - I Pre- and Non-Literate, 2 - 3 Beginning, 4 - 5 Intermediate) since most refugees are in ESL classes at those levels. (A range of 0 - 4 is given for general pronunciation levels. See page 20.) We have also included levels 6 - 7 to show the range of ability at the Advanced Level. It is important to emphasize that students who have reached an SPL level of 5 (or 7, for that matter) in oral language, can function in English, but are not near-native speakers of English.

What is presented in the current document are the SPLs for **oral** language only. These have proven to remain fairly much the same over the past 15 years. However, the reading and writing (literacy) competencies need to be reformulated. We have learned much about reading and writing over the past 15 years which should be reflected in the SPLs. A more complete listing, including reading and writing, will be available from the English Language Training/Technical Assistance Project in 1998.

Where programs are concerned, the SPL descriptions provide a summary of a student's general language ability **upon entry into an instructional level** in the Core Curriculum. For this updated MELT, the following guidelines for placement would apply:

Student SPL level	MELT Level	B.E.S.T.	CASAS Scores
0 or 1	Pre- and Non-Literate	0-15	0-179
2 or 3	Beginning	16-41	180-200
4 or 5	Intermediate	42-57	201-220
6 or 7		58 & above	221 & above

As students exit a program, assessments should be given (see following section) to find out how much students have learned, and to assign new SPLs if applicable.

The question of how long it takes to move from one SPL to another has been asked. This is a difficult question to answer, since individual student characteristics and program specifications play such an important role, e.g. motivation, age, class size, preparation of teachers, intensity of instruction, etc. The original MELT project's field-testing of the SPL and Core Curriculum documents was unable to take into account all these

conditions, making the hard data on contact hours required for level movements difficult to gauge, with ranges from 120-235 hours per SPL. We suggest that individual programs keep track of how long it takes about 50 students to move from one SPL to another, and take an average of these hours to use as a guideline.

Student Performance Levels

General Language Ability	Listening Comprehension	Oral Communication
0 No ability whatsoever.	No ability whatsoever.	No ability whatsoever.
1 Functions minimally, if at all , in English. Can handle only very routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral communication, and in which all tasks can be easily demonstrated . A native speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers can rarely communicate with a person at this level except through gestures .	Understands only a few isolated words, and extremely simple learned phrases.	Vocabulary limited to a few isolated words . No control of grammar.
2 Functions in a very limited way in situations related to immediate needs . Can handle only routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral communication, and in which all tasks can be easily demonstrated . A native English speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers will have great difficulty communicating with a person at this level .	Understands a limited number of very simple learned phrases, spoken slowly with frequent repetitions .	Expresses a limited number of immediate survival needs using very simple learned phrases.

General Language Ability

Listening Comprehension Oral Communication

3 Functions **with some difficulty** in situations related to **immediate needs**.

Can handle **routine entry-level** jobs that involve only the **most basic** oral **communication**, and in which all tasks can be **demonstrated**.

A native English speaker **used to** dealing with limited English speakers will have **great difficulty** communicating with a person at this level.

Understands **simple learned** phrases, spoken **slowly** with **frequent repetitions**.

Expresses **immediate survival** needs using **simple learned** phrases.

4 Can satisfy **basic survival** needs and a few **very routine** social demands.

Can handle **entry-level** jobs that involve **some simple oral** communication, but in

which tasks can be easily **demonstrated**.

A native English speaker **used to** dealing with

limited English speakers will have **difficulty** communicating with a person at this level.

Understands **simple learned phrases** easily, and **some simple new** phrases containing familiar vocabulary, spoken **slowly** with **frequent repetitions**.

Expresses **basic survival** needs including asking and responding to related questions, using both **learned and a limited number of new phrases**.

Participates in basic conversations in a **few very routine social** situations.

Speaks with **hesitation** and frequent pauses.

Some control of **basic** grammar.

5 Can satisfy **basic survival** needs and **some limited social** demands.

Can handle **jobs and job training** that involve following **simple oral** instructions but in which most tasks can also be **demonstrated**.

A native English speaker **used to** dealing with limited English speakers will have **some difficulty** communicating with a person at this level.

Understands **learned** phrases easily and **short new** phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken **slowly** with **repetition**.

Has limited **ability** to understand on the **telephone**.

Functions **independent-** in most **face-to-face basic survival** situations but needs **some help**.

Asks and responds to direct questions on familiar and some unfamiliar subjects.

Still relies on **learned** phrases but also uses **new** phrases (i.e. speaks with **some creativity**) but with **hesitation** and pauses.

Communicates on the **phone** to express a **limited** number of **survival** needs, but with **some difficulty**.

Participates in basic conversations in a **limited number of social** situations.

Can occasionally clarify general meaning by simple rewording.

Increasing, but **inconsistent** control of basic grammar.

General Language Ability Listening Comprehension Oral Communication

<p>6 Can satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands.</p> <p>Can handle jobs and job training that involve following simple oral and written instructions and diagrams.</p> <p>A native English speaker not used to dealing with limited-English speakers will be able to communicate with a person at this level on familiar topics, but with difficulty and some effort.</p>	<p>Understands conversations containing some unfamiliar vocabulary on many everyday subjects, with a need for repetition, rewording or slower speech.</p> <p>Has some ability to understand without face-to-face contact (e.g. on the telephone, TV).</p>	<p>Functions independently in most survival situations, but needs some help.</p> <p>Relies less on learned phrases; speaks with creativity, but with hesitation.</p> <p>Communicates on the phone on familiar subjects but with some difficulty.</p> <p>Participates with some confidence in social situations when addressed directly.</p> <p>Can sometimes clarify general meaning by rewording.</p> <p>Control of basic grammar evident, but inconsistent; may attempt to use more difficult grammar but with almost no control.</p>
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General Language Ability Listening Comprehension Oral Communication

7 Can satisfy **survival** needs and **routine work** and **social** demands.

Can handle work that involves following **oral and simple written** instructions in **familiar and some unfamiliar** situations.

A native English speaker **not used to** dealing with limited English speakers can **generally communicate** with a person at this level **on familiar topics**.

Understands **conversations** on most **everyday** subjects at **normal speed** when addressed **directly**; may **need repetition, rewording, or slower speech**.

Understands **routine work-related** conversations.

Increasing ability to understand **without face-to-face** contact (telephone, TV, radio).

Has **difficulty** following **conversation** between **native speakers**.

Functions **independently** in **survival** and many **social and work** situations, but may need **help occasionally**.

Communicates on the phone on **familiar** subjects.

Expands on basic ideas in conversation, but still speaks with **hesitation** while searching for appropriate vocabulary and grammar.

Clarifies **general meaning** easily, and can **sometimes** convey **exact** meaning.

Controls basic grammar, but not more difficult grammar.

Global Pronunciation Rating Scale:

0 - speech is almost always unintelligible

1 - speech is frequently unintelligible

2 - speech is generally understandable, but occasionally incomprehensible

3 - speech is readily understandable

The descriptions below are averages across the range of what students at the end of each level can do. A student who is pre-or non-literate when they start to learn may move more slowly; a student who is fully literate in his/her native language may move faster. Note that the levels below do not represent K-12 grade level reading ability.

Revised Writing Levels

Writing Level	Description
0	No ability whatsoever in English.
I	Individual can copy letters of the alphabet, numbers, own name and address. Individual may have difficulty using a writing instrument.
II	Individual can write very basic personal information and numbers. Can write sight words and may be able to write simple messages using learned phrases. Mechanics of writing is limited to simple punctuation (e.g. period and question mark).
III	Individual can write basic personal information and some notes and simple messages on familiar subjects. Mechanics of writing, including capitalization, period, and question mark, is generally consistent
IV	Individual can write notes and messages on familiar subjects, can use simple paragraph form, and can organize some learned vocabulary and grammatical structures into new patterns. Has limited grammatical accuracy.
V	Individual can write simple narrative descriptions on everyday topics (e.g. customs in native country, note to teacher, etc.) Attempts to elaborate on main idea. Grammar is still inconsistent. Is gaining control of mechanics of writing
VI	Individual can write simple narratives and descriptive paragraphs with development of ideas. Grammar is more consistent.
VII	Individual can write with appropriate purpose and tone of writing. Writing is fluid. Grammar is consistent

Revised Reading Level	Description
O	No ability whatsoever in English.
I	Individual recognizes most letters of the alphabet and may be able to read one's own name or a few isolated words. Can read single digit numbers.
II	Individual can recognize upper and lower case letters and numbers up to 1000 (e.g. prices, addresses, social security, etc.), and common sight words (e.g. signs and symbols).
III	Individual can read and comprehend simple learned phrases or short sentences, containing familiar vocabulary in familiar contexts, e.g. "Where do you live?" Has a limited understanding of connected prose, and may need frequent re-readings
IV	Individual reads and understands sentences in single or linked paragraphs on familiar subjects containing familiar vocabulary, (e.g. short note from a teacher).
V	Individual can read texts on subjects of personal interest that have a simple and clear underlying structure (e.g. main idea and chronological order) and can use some context to determine meaning.
VI	Individuals able to read instructions, descriptive prose, and narrative on familiar subjects or from which new vocabulary can be determined by context, e.g. a simple news story. Can make some minimal inferences about familiar texts. Emerging reading strategies are evident, (e.g. can compare and contrast, sequence information) but not consistent
VII	Individual can consistently read and understand materials on everyday subjects related to most adult roles. Can interpret

	descriptive narratives and infer meaning from texts on familiar topics. Can scan and skim texts for meaning (e.g. consumer information).
VIII	Individual can read and understand materials on unfamiliar topics, but may have trouble with difficult vocabulary or grammar. Skims and scans texts, compares, and sequences information with consistency.

Reading and Writing Level Descriptions were prepared by Allene G. Grognet in consultation with ELT Partners and other practitioners.